

# MAN'S ABUSE OF GOD'S AMAZING GRACE

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP - INCARNATION - CREATURE INTERMEDIARY  
IRRESISTIBLE/CHEAP - ISSUES/CONTROVERSIES - CHRISTIAN GRACES

@ Grace - God's Love - Hell's Horror - Nexus

- *Teacher Seneca To Student Nero*  
Mercy Involves Reason Where  
Decision In Our Full Control;
- *Teacher Seneca To Student Nero*  
Pity Is Akin To 'Wretchedness'  
It Is Helplessly Succumbing At  
The Sight Of The Ill Of Others

@ Grace - God's Love - Hell's Horror - Nexus

- **MERCY:** WHERE WE  
DO NOT GET WHAT WE  
DO REALLY DESERVE
- **GRACE:** WHERE WE  
DO GET WHAT WE DO  
NOT REALLY DESERVE

BY DAVID L. BURRIS



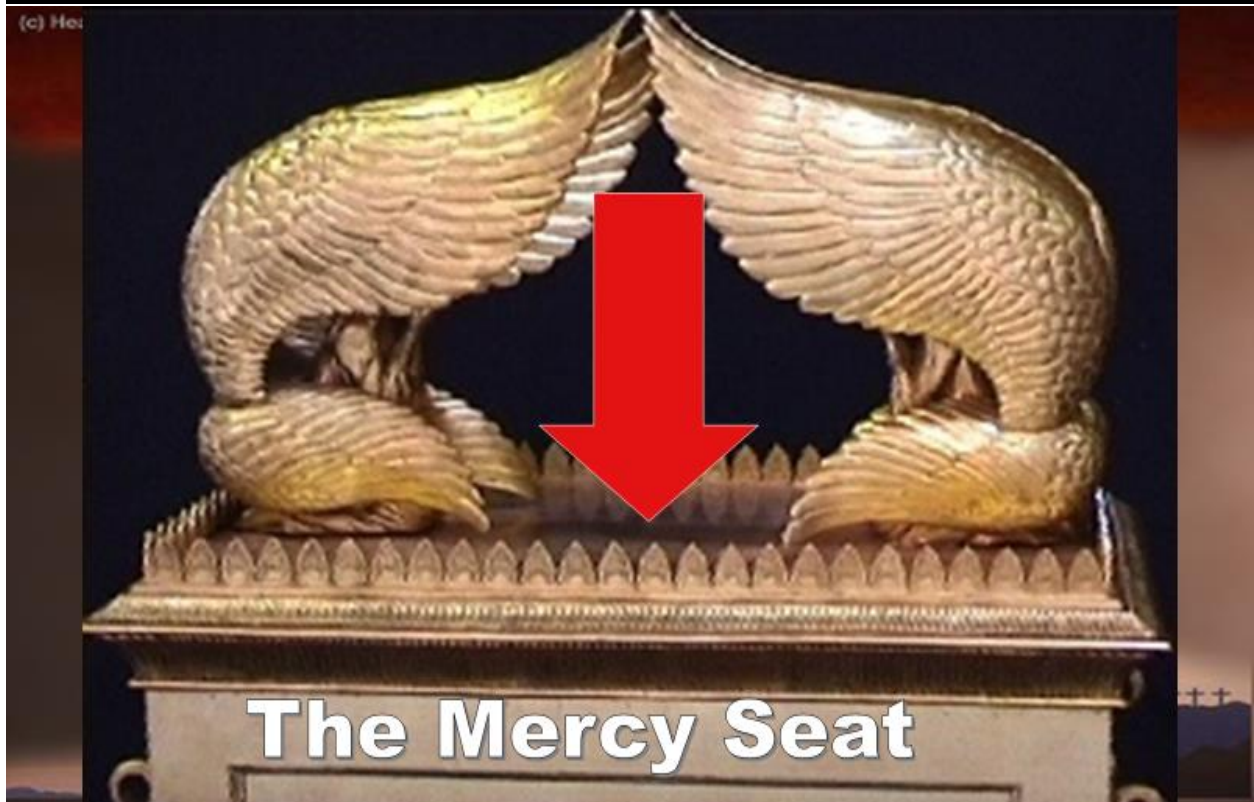
## grace upon grace

"The Word became flesh, and lived among us. We saw his glory, such glory as of the one and only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about him. He cried out, saying, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me, for he was before me.'" From his fullness we all received grace upon grace."

John 1:14-16 (WEB)

# Mercy & Grace in the Old Testament





*Mercy & Grace in the New Testament*



## The Defining Of Mercy

1. *Forbearance to inflict harm under circumstances of provocation, when one has the power to inflict it; compassionate treatment of offender or adversary; BACON - Examples of justice must be made for terror to some; examples of mercy for comfort to others."*
2. *Compassionate treatment of the unfortunate and helpless; often, favor, beneficence. Luke 10. 37.*
3. *Disposition to exercise compassion or favor; pity; compassion; willingness to spare or to help.*
4. *Blessing regarded as a manifestation of compassion or favor. "The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." 2 Corinthians. 1. 3*

## Specific To The Mercy Of God:

- We are guilty, no question of it!
- The basis of mercy is not found in the worthiness of the recipient.
- The character of the mercy giver is shown in the giving of mercy to the benefit of those undeserving.
- We have to exercise caution not to presume upon God's mercy. We are neither worthy or deserving of it.

### The Mercy Of God's Ways Romans 11: 30-32

- Three times the mercy of God is highlighted
  - To the Gentiles vs 30
  - To the Jews vs 31
  - To the whole world vs 32
- All of us are in a prison of our own making vs 32
  - The emphasis is on ALL
  - Our disobedience was the reason
  - God's mercy comes to the imprisoned

## Special Love For The Human Race: Kenotic

### Agape Love Vs. Altruistic Behavior:

- ***Kinship Altruism*** – *Friends Of Necessity*
- ***Reciprocal Altruism*** – *Social Relations & Calculated Exchange Out Of Self-Interest*
- ***Altruism Pure Of Ego*** - *Extends Backyard & Neighbor To The World & All Creation*
- ***Pure Altruism*** – *Foundational Of Ethical Standards & The Ground Of Moral Life*
- ***Altruistic Behavior*** - *The Building Block Of Real Spirituality & True Agape Love!*

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## Special Love For The Human Race: Kenotic

- Question: What Is “Unlimited Love”?
- Answer: It Is Not “Unconditional Love”!
- Answer: It Is The Core & Root Of Each Of The Above Forms; This love is human as compassion is to person-in-suffering, as care is to person-in-need, as forgiveness is to person-in-error.
- Answer: “Unlimited Love” Is An “Irreducible Love”; It suggests a type of love that rises above every conceivable limit to embrace all of humanity in joy, care, compassion, and generativity.
- Answer: It Is In Its Own Class Above & Beyond These Classic & Modern Descriptions; This Type Love Is - As One Indivisible & As Other Inseparable - From The Divine Presence That Underlies The Cosmos & Makes Life As A Gift Meaningful!
- Answer: It Is The Outside Love Of Inner Peace; Seven Elements Complete This Expansive Love: To Reveal Value – To Attentively Understand – To Sertously Communicate – To Celebrate Together – To Individually Empower – To Personally Be In Community – To Freely Forgive.

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Higher Law & Highest Order Of Love:  
*Generative & Co-Creative*

• **TWO ASPECTS:**

• **“God Is” – i.e. “I Am”**

- General Response To Specific Questions Of Eternality  
Categorical Rationale: Time Is To Be Understood Both Dynamically  
& Relationally. In Other Words, Those Sharing In Similar Sentience  
Participate Together In The Endless Condition Of Consciousness.

• **“God Is Love” –**

- General Response To Specific Questions Of Treatment
- Categorical Rationale: Those Not Sharing Similar Conscience Sentenced  
To Separate Community & In Location Opposite Honey Light Of Heaven

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God's Love Is Longsuffering!

Vessels Of Mercy

Romans 9



# O.T. Prefiguration of N.T. Dispensation

## THE NASTY NINEVITES

*Genesis 9:18–11:9; Jonah 1–3*

### the history and heritage of a heinous people

Let's get back to Jonah's story, and the history of the Ninevites. Nineveh had been established in the early years of the post flood world. We see the city appear first in the accounts of Scripture with Genesis 10:11, where the leader Nimrod was up to no good. He, like Jonah, would face his own consequences for disobedience. Nimrod's actions were less than godly. In fact, his name, meaning "rebel," gives us a clue as to what we should expect from him.

**Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, one of Noah's sons. Ham was the son who made fun of his father Noah during a moment of his father's drunkenness. God pronounced a curse over Ham and his lineage as a consequence of this disrespect shown to his father.**

Nimrod led nations that would ultimately become part of Assyria, including Nineveh. One of the areas he led was Babel, a town with a nasty reputation. It was in this city long ago that people were disobedient to God and tried to build a tower in their own strength, the Tower of Babel, designed to reach the heavens. The tower building adventure began when God told the people to scatter and populate the world, but they decided to stay and build a tower of fame together instead. They directly disobeyed the will of God. This tower's lasting reputation bears witness to what happens when men trust in their own strength and pride, and a focus on their own glory.

With a rough foundation for the nation, is it any surprise that the people of the region would still be experiencing sinful lifestyles in Jonah's day? Should we be shocked that the Ninevites would be determined to make wrong decisions, and were committed to idol worship? Nineveh was built with a heritage of waywardness, and a misplaced focus on self and rebellion.

### the journey to rebellion begins

Nineveh was a land that through the ages escaped positive feelings in the minds and hearts of the Jews. The Hebrews knew the history of grief between their people and the Assyrians. Jonah surely would have allowed his preconceived ideas and pre-judging opinions to lead the way as he considered God's call to send him to the nation he'd most rather avoid.

While other prophets had prophesied against nations, only Jonah had the calling to travel and deliver his message in person. This would be a new challenge for Jonah and his message would impact the pagan world in a fresh, powerful way. This assignment would also be a strong witness to the Jews, a way of correcting their attitude towards Assyria. This mission would ultimately show God's mercy toward the Gentiles.

To bring God's desired result, Jonah would have to travel and speak life to those who would rather see him dead. After all, he wasn't coming to bring them their sweepstakes winnings; he was coming to preach against their sin. There was great risk, but God's equipping power was more than sufficient to help Jonah accomplish the task ahead.

## jonah's dilemma

Think about it. Prophet and all around good guy, Jonah was set on minding his own business. Then, one day, God tells him to go to the arch enemy's camp, the evil people whose wickedness seems to seep out of their veins. That task, in and of itself, is difficult enough. But Jonah isn't only supposed to go there; he's also called to lead them to God! See, they aren't just mean. They don't believe in the God of creation. They follow false gods, and put their faith in their own strength. Jonah is called to bring those pagans to the God of mercy and forgiveness!

*And, if God is getting ready to forgive them, then that means the messenger would have to forgive as well. Jonah would have to accept the revival among the people he thought were the least deserving of God's love.*

Here's the catch for most of us. It's one thing to know there are bad people out there. It's an entirely different thing to see God transform those wicked lives, and put the moral and spiritual outcasts in the same camp as the "good church people." After all, any level of outward religious superiority wouldn't cut it. We'd be in the same category in God's eyes, which would cause us to have to accept the transformed believers as equal to us. Our hearts would have to soften toward these harsh people.

*No matter what their past looked like.*

*No matter how much bad stuff they'd done.*

*No matter how far we thought they were from God.*

Why? If our spiritual and physical enemies accept Jesus as their Savior, they are no longer enemies. They become part of our spiritual family. They are fellow believers. And then, the ball is in our court. We have to forgive, accept, and rejoice. But can we? In theory, this isn't so tough. In practice, especially if we're dealing with our super bad, totally rotten, arch enemy number one, we usually find the one having to change the most isn't the new believer. It's us; we who thought we were spiritually better than somebody else just because we were good church folk.

As far as I know, Jonah hadn't personally been offended by the Ninevites. He hadn't personally gone to battle with them. He was in another region, living among his people and serving his God. Yet when God called him to preach to his people's enemies, I can understand a little or even a lot of hesitation. A cultural divide and a generational enmity was there. But a personal offense? I bet Jonah never had a chat with a Ninevite. He probably hadn't ever taken the time to get to know them personally. And, for him, that distance was just fine.

**God was sending Jonah to the Ninevites. Whether he wanted to go or not had no bearing on God's call.**

## **arch enemy number one**

Picture your "arch enemy number one"—you know, the person you have the hardest time forgiving. Now, think about how God loves that person just as much as He loves you. Not only that, but how God wants that person to be in a right relationship with Himself, and wants nothing more than to see that person spend eternity in the perfection and bliss of heaven. Right beside you. Sure, God understands the pain that person may have caused you, and He sees all the person's faults and failings. But God remains in the redemption business. He longs to redeem that person through the blood of Jesus Christ. Just like He does for you.

Tough to imagine, isn't it? Your thoughts might be something like this: *Sure, the person might be tolerable for short periods of time, but eternity? In heaven? With all the "good" people of the world? They don't deserve it! Look how much they used to hate God. No way! Not happening.*

I imagine Jonah going through the same mental process when he thought of the idea of God redeeming the Ninevites. A perceived enemy. A real threat. A calling to share. A command to love. A message of hope. Forgiveness.

**God didn't give Jonah the job to decide who was worthy of revival and salvation, and last time I checked, we didn't get that job position either.**

## **faulty wisdom**

Jonah viewed the Ninevites as his spiritual arch enemies, unworthy of God's salvation, and all-around bad people. Was he justified for having these thoughts? Well, according to history books, these people were worse than we could imagine. Enmity knows no limit. If we were standing with Jonah, we'd be shaking in our sandals at the thought of entering their camp as an outsider too. But that fear doesn't give him the right to judge whether they are worthy of God's forgiveness!

If we lived in the days of Jonah, we'd know the military strength and the superiority of the Assyrian leaders, and we'd have a clear understanding of how much the people detested our God, our people, and our lives. No wonder Jonah got caught in the trap of thinking they were unworthy of redemption. With this kind of attitude, we see how rebellion began to rise up within the prophet. Why should he go and share the news of God with notoriously terrible people?

The real problem involved much more than dealing with a wicked people. Deep down, Jonah knew God was able to save the Ninevites. The unruly prophet understood the power of God. He didn't doubt God's ability. So, what caused the godly man to run the other way?

Jonah thought the people of Nineveh didn't deserve what God could do. His attitude became his excuse to judge, condemn, withhold the love of God, and to resist the call to share the hope of his Savior. This spiritual foundation crack led to attitude misalignment, and bad choices.

## **Jonah didn't doubt God's power to save; Jonah just didn't think they deserved it!**

Think you're immune from this same condition? Careful! Jonah was a prophet, chosen by God to do the work of God. In a weak moment of following his own wisdom instead of God's perfect plan, Jonah found himself running down the path of rebellion as fast as his little prophet legs could carry him.<sup>1</sup>

### **the point of grace**

After three days in the belly of a fish, trapped beneath the water's surface in a dark, sloshing cavity of juices and digesting food, Jonah must have been at his wit's end. Having time to think, process, and worry, the swallowed prophet would surely have had sufficient time to realize the magnitude of his rebellion. He not only walked away from his job; he walked away from his God. Yet, as we will see, the God of second chances hadn't walked away from him.

## **Jonah had hit his spiritual rock bottom while catching a ride on the ocean's floor.**

### **oh, Lord . . .**

To me, one of the most precious things about Scripture is the inclusion of the prayers of God's people. When God gives us a glimpse into the prayer life of His followers, we learn about the intimacy of their holy relationship, and feel their hearts cry out. We realize we're not the only ones going through tough times, and build belief that God will be there in our darkest hour too.

While in the depths of the sea in the cage of the fish's belly, Jonah cried out to God. His prayer is recorded in Chapter Two of the book of Jonah. Listen to his repentant heart:

*“. . . 'I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me. I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice'" (Jonah 2:2).*

Through the time alone, spent thinking, repenting, re-evaluating, searching for answers, the prophet recognizes God never left Him. He understands that God is his rescuer & he knows that his trouble was compounded by his decision to run from the One who could deliver him.

*"So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless, I will look again toward Your holy temple'" (Jonah 2:4).*

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<sup>1</sup> Devlin, J. (2011). [\*Choosing to run: jonah's encounter with god's grace\*](#). Nashville: Randall House.

Jonah knew he had run from much more than Nineveh. He ran from God. And, in order to get back on track, he fully understood the need to return to God and to worship. Well, look at verse four above. He decides, and voices his desire, to return to God. Return to a right heart attitude.

## re-commit

Beyond recognizing his need to worship God, Jonah also praises God, and re-commits to the plan God has for him:

*“But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the LORD” (Jonah 2:9).*

He’s gone beyond his own pride, and called out to God in humility and worship. His thoughts would have sounded like this: *Yes, Lord. I will go. I will praise. I will worship. Just hear my prayer. . .*

## climbing to the surface?

*“Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land” (Jonah 2:10).*

God heard. God delivered the prophet from his captivity. You know, I can’t help but cringe when I hear how he was delivered from the fish. Who wants to be spit out of a fish? I don’t think I’ve ever thought of a sea creature with an upset stomach. I imagine this was the best way to quickly get the guy back on track. Besides the miraculous expulsion of the man, let’s not miss the destination. God put Jonah on dry land. Now, He could have just as easily let Jonah swim out of the fish’s mouth, and have to swim to the surface on his own. Then, he would have to swim to shore. But the God of second chances is also the God who is full of mercy and love for His people.

*God put the prophet on terra firma.*

*Dry land.*

*Ready to move.*

*Ready for action.*

Think about Jonah’s physical appearance when he reached dry land. It must have been quite disturbing to onlookers. The creature’s stomach juices would have bleached the man’s skin. The three days of moist lodging would have impacted his looks as well. And then there’s the smell. Oh, the smell. Now, picture this guy of epic nastiness walking toward Nineveh. My point? God can use the least likely vessel to share His truth. And, as we’ll see, looks aren’t everything. God’s Word will always accomplish exactly what He wants it to do.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Devlin, J. (2011). [\*Choosing to run: jonah’s encounter with god’s grace\*](#). Nashville: Randall House.

## get it?

Did Jonah get it? Did he fully understand what God was trying to teach him through this entire ordeal? I'm not so sure. Yes, Jonah chose to obey and travel to Nineveh when God gave him a second chance. He spoke words of truth that caused revival in the hearts of the wicked. Lives were changed. The word was preached.

*Then the pity party began.*

*"He prayed to the LORD said, 'Please, LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity'" (Jonah 4:2).*

Can you hear the prophet's whine? His displeased tone? I can. *Oh, God, I knew You could do this; that's why I ran!* Jonah knew God was going to transform lives. He didn't doubt God could do what He set out to do. The real problem was that from the very beginning of his journey, the prophet didn't think those rotten people deserved it. After revival broke out, Jonah still didn't think they deserved it.

The prophet was so adamant about his distaste of the Ninevites' transformation; he complained to God that he would have rather died. The drama seeps from the pages of scripture in verse 3:

*"Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life."*

Hate was literally going to be the death of Jonah; if he had his way. The depth of Jonah's unmerciful heart toward the Ninevites is gut-wrenchingly sad. Here, the prophet who had experienced grace and a glorious rescue from death is now ready to give up the miracle of his second chance. All because God did what He said He would do, and spared a bunch of people who never made Jonah's Christmas card list.

God's response?

*"The LORD said, 'Do you have good reason to be angry?'" (Jonah 4:4)*

I love this. God took time to ask the prophet if his angst was justified. The Lord called him out on his bad attitude. God, in His mercy, whispers to Jonah's spirit: *do you have a right to be so miserable? Is this your mission or mine?*

When we walk around with a pitiful attitude, we are much like Jonah. We might also stomp around in a toxic cloud of irritated emotions. Do we have any reason to be angry when God moves in the lives of people we don't like? Do we have a right to tell God who we think deserves His mercy?

When we are focused on self, these issues fill our mind. When we focus on God, we look at how He is choosing to transform lives, and give Him praise for it. If we don't switch to God's focus, we can be sure God will lovingly remind us He's there, and that His work is about Him and not us. Nothing snaps us out of this fog quicker than the correction of a loving father.

**God whispers to us: is this your mission or mine?**

## pity party extraordinaire

Have you ever had a pity party? I mean, a real live moment where you not only have a private meltdown, but look for anybody and everybody to confirm your suspicion that the whole world is against you? Come on. I know you've experienced it. Sure, you might be shaking your head "no" while looking around to see if anyone knows what you're reading. Maybe you are wondering if anyone will tell on you for your own moments of complete and utter silliness. It's ok. Many of us live our party lives with you. Pity party lives that is.

Let me welcome you to the club of the many who have walked in your footsteps. Jonah would have been one of the early, charter members of this distinct association. The older brother in the prodigal story definitely had his laminated membership card on hand at all times. I can hear our constitutional confession now:

*We, the people, of the pity party association, do hereby commit to having an emotional outburst and flailing fits any time we think the world has ganged up against us, or we haven't gotten our way. We do hereby forget to recognize our need for God, the One who can snap us out of this destructive mood. We honor one of the most dubious members of our group, Jonah, the prophet who didn't get his way in Nineveh.*

Ok, I'll leave it alone. I just want us all to realize that Jonah isn't so far-fetched a soul. He isn't as ridiculous as our denial-ridden minds make him out to be. See, we think we wouldn't be this bad. We wouldn't ever react like Jonah. We wouldn't lose sight of God like that. Or would we?

Remember; he's human. He got irritated at God because he didn't get his way. Because God prevailed in the lives of those perishing people. Really, the issue became this: Jonah couldn't justify his reluctance to see the Ninevites being brought into relationship with God. He couldn't find anyone to go along with his faulty opinions and expectations. The gig was up.

**Jonah could no longer justify his reluctance to see the Ninevites being brought into relationship with God.**

## time-out

Jonah wished he would die. He had done what God asked, but was disgusted with the whole situation. Now, God had the nerve to ask him what right he had to be mad. I imagine Jonah had just about enough of life and this whole prophet business. What did he do? Jonah put himself in time-out.

I imagine the grumpy prophet stomping out of the city limits mumbling and grumbling to himself; griping half out loud and half in his mind about all the details of his journey. He must have been thinking (with a critical spirit of course) about all the people he had encountered, trying to point out in his mind all the ways they were inferior to him.

The prophet most certainly understood the revival that had taken place, but just as surely must have been trying to justify his poor attitude. Jonah went off to the edge of town to pout. He hid from the very people he had preached to and converted. Instead of celebrating the victory of his efforts, and God's redeeming power, he ran from his calling once again.

*Hiding from the evidence of a merciful God.*

*Leaving the scene of God's presence in the lives of new believers.*

*Searching for solitude, far away from the fingerprint of God.*

*But, you can't out run God. Or escape the love of God.*

**You can't out run God, or escape His love.**

## **shady days**

Jonah once again became focused on his own comfort; determined to find shade in the desert. He built a shelter to keep the sun off his tender skin. Keep in mind, this skin of his had been through a lot in the past week. I'm sure the last thing he wanted was sunburn on top of the bleached skin from the fish days.

*"Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade until he could see what would happen in the city" (Jonah 4:5).*

Jonah realized he needed a shelter, and got right to work. But then again, so did God.

*"So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant" (Jonah 4:6).*

Funny thing about pity parties. They stem from a self-focused mind and the pity party ends once the self-focused mind gets something good to think about. Something that feeds our selfish desires. Notice, Jonah didn't acknowledge God. He just jumped for joy because there was shade over his head.

The Lord provided creatively for the needs of the discouraged man. He brought comfort in the form of a shade plant to a wilting prophet in the desert. God's provision of the shade plant is a wonderful example of His love. His tenderness. His compassion for His people. Even though Jonah had little compassion for the Ninevites.

And, when God provided such shade, Jonah didn't even bother to acknowledge God's blessing in his life. Jonah didn't bother to praise God, for the Ninevites' revival or for his own comfort. All this passage tells us is that the prophet was really happy about the plant that suddenly appeared with the sole purpose of easing his sunburned face. Soon enough, God would once again remind the prophet who was Lord.

*"But God appointed a worm when dawn came the next day and it attacked the plant and it withered" (Jonah 4:7).*

**Don't forget to give God praise for the many blessings in your life!**

At dawn the worm came. It ate this selfish man's shade. Don't you just smile at the fact that the worm came at dawn—when the shade plant would begin to be useful? Jonah didn't wake up to find his provision gone; he watched it being eaten away as the sun rose in the sky. As the heat increased, and his comfort disintegrated with each bite that little wormy creature took.

Think about it. God provided the plant to show Jonah He was still there, He still cared for the prophet, and He wanted to provide comfort. But, God also provided the opportunity for the



prophet to acknowledge and praise God for His lovingkindness. When Jonah missed the point all together, God took away this gift of shade with a new kind of provision. He allowed the prophet to witness the consequences for forgetting God.

## windy days

As if the storm, the sea creature, the plant, and the worm weren't enough creative provision from God, He also meets the prophet with another type of provision; a scorching east wind. Now, it doesn't take much to realize that a hot wind blasting through a desert land is less than desirable. It's down right miserable.

*"When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, 'Death is better to me than life'" (Jonah 4:8).*

Hot sun. Burning wind. Sand kicking up, probably getting in Jonah's eyes. Sunburned skin. Feeling faint. Desperate plea for comfort, even through death. Jonah's idea of rescue couldn't be further from the real solution. Death would not rescue him! Only God could rescue him from this situation; the very One Jonah refused to acknowledge or submit to. You'd think he would get the point by now. I wonder; is this his fourth, or fifth chance?

**Only God can rescue us!**

## holy provision!

Provision. The daily needs in life are met by relationships, paychecks, generosity, and smart planning. While we work hard to provide the things we need in life, God also provides for our needs. Sometimes, His provision is unexpected, surprisingly unique, and always on time. Many times, His provision occurs before we even know we need it. He knows what we need before we ask.

God's holy provision stems from His love for us, and His desire for our lives to become more aligned with His principles. Because of God's motivation, His provision comes in many forms. Some ways bless us with things that sustain us. Other times, God provides in ways that create moments for us to re-evaluate our relationship with Him. Or, they become powerful teaching moments for our lives, incorporating creative tools that impact us in ways we never imagined.

God provided more than the fish who swallowed a prophet. He provided the storm, the scorching east wind, the shade plant, and the worm. Odd to see this as God's provision, isn't it? When I think of God's provision, I think of ways He blesses us. Resources He puts in our path to help us complete the task He has called us to do. Money. Volunteers. Clear skies and no traffic. But provision that brings us to our knees? Hard to imagine. Yet this is exactly the kind of provision God brought to Jonah.

**God provides in creative ways; some of which bring us to our knees.<sup>3</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> Devlin, J. (2011). [\*Choosing to run: jonah's encounter with god's grace\*](#). Nashville: Randall House.

When Elijah ran, God ran with Him. Not in the way you might be thinking; see God never backs down from the truth. But He doesn't leave or forsake His people either. So, when Elijah was down and out in a moment of complete defeat, God sustained.

***Encouraged.***

***Built up.***

***Provided.***

***Nourished.***

***Loved.***

After running from the threats of Jezebel for awhile, the upset prophet sat under a tree, asking God to let him die. Sound familiar? Sound like Jonah's situation? Different causes, similar effects. Not only did God say no to his request, He provided the shelter of that juniper tree, and sent an angel to tend to the weary prophet. Food, water, comfort, all given by God to sustain the frustrated and scared man. Instead of Jonah's correction, Elijah received God's comfort.

This is an essential factor to understand as we look at Elijah. See, God is with us when we are obediently following His call, and He also hears our cry when we can't find the strength to go on another minute. I need this truth, don't you? Think about it. If we only knew that God was with us when we were smack dab in the middle of His calling for our lives that would be enough, but God in all His great love for us He is also committed to loving us through the hardest moments we will face. When we have opposition, or persecution, or defeat, His love sustains us when we've gotten to the point that we can't take one more step.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Devlin, J. (2011). [\*Choosing to run: jonah's encounter with god's grace\*](#). Nashville: Randall House.

## Prodigality: Facing the Agony of Being Lost

*Everything about the demand the boy made cut against the grain of Hebrew society's core values.*

JOHN MACARTHUR

Jesus began the parable of the two sons with a comment the younger son made to his father: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me" (Luke 15:12). In our culture, the request might seem demanding—even rude—but not all that surprising. We are familiar with a certain sense of entitlement that young people have today, and stories of children being demanding to their parents are certainly not uncommon.

However, to Jesus' first-century Jewish audience, the younger son would have represented the worst kind of sinner they could imagine. Here was a son who flagrantly dishonored not only his father and his family's property but also his very homeland. Everything about the boy's demand would have cut against the grain of that society's core values.

In order to get inside the parable and feel what its first hearers would have felt, we need to understand that honor was everything in that society. This young man heaped shame on himself and his family through his selfishness, and the response would have been even harsher than the shame attacks people sometimes suffer today when others turn against them in social media. Jesus' audience would have felt this young man deserved the worst of what society could dish out in terms of treating him as an outcast.

With this in mind, let's take a look at what this son did to merit being reckoned as "dead" to all decent people.<sup>5</sup>

### Experiencing Our Father's Love

*The Prodigal therefore hung helpless in the balance between life and death, and if his father turned him away, he would be doomed.*

JOHN MACARTHUR

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2016). [\*The prodigal son study guide: an astonishing study of the parable Jesus told to unveil God's grace for you\*](#). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

*“And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living” (Luke 15:13).*

## **Selfish living doesn’t just burn a hole in our pocket; it burns a hole in our soul.**

The journey to squanderdom wasn’t the worst of his problems. The younger son spent everything, with no regard for his future. The irony of his situation is the money was an inheritance; money intended to be given later with the purpose of safeguarding his future. See, it isn’t just that he experienced some “loose living”—the boy found himself in a land dealing with hard times caused by famine. He was going to starve to death if he didn’t do something!

*“Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So, he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine” (Luke 15:14-15).*

The new money kid went from wealth and prosperity to a bargain basement lifestyle, ultimately finding himself starving and begging for a job. Where did his arrogance go? What happened to the kid who boldly asked for his inheritance advance? Apparently, when life hit full-force, the boy realized money can’t buy you everything.

Feeding swine. If we needed a reality check, I imagine this kind of job would do it. Jews normally wouldn’t eat pigs or use them for sacrifices, let alone work with them or touch them. This young man had hit his own rock bottom moment in life.

## **just a good meal, please!**

The prodigal worked with the pigs, and found himself wishing he could eat the scraps they ate. The boy who must have been used to the finest meals was now dreaming of scraps. Don’t believe me? Read verse 16: *“And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.”*

Have you seen what the animals eat on a farm? I think it would be quite a rock bottom moment indeed to want to eat from the pig’s trough. Ah, but the desperate option brings forth a light bulb moment. The once rich kid “came to his senses” according to the story, and figures out that his dad’s hired men are eating better than he is. What brought him to his senses? Humility? Hunger?

## **the long road home**

Ok. Here we get to the point of the prodigal story. It would be very easy for us to sit back and think that this kid deserved everything he gets; the judgment of poverty is deserved, and his inheritance, though gone, was all he would ever get from his father. Except the scene in the story turns out much different.

*“So, he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).*

I can almost see the man squinting out into the distance, wondering if he was seeing things. *Could it be? Is it really him?* And then, as the blurry shape came closer with each step, it was clear. It was his boy. The father had compassion for the wayward son. Didn't care where the money went. He wasn't looking for excuses. He was looking for his son's return.

The son was focused on the reunion as well. He was hungry. Tired of being out on his own. He was worn out from his depleting journey. He spotted his dad in the distance, and I'm sure at that moment, a sense of peace flowed over him. Like an inner certainty that no matter what his dad said, it would be ok, because at least he was home. The boy's attitude has changed. He is humbled. He began begging for forgiveness, showing a side of himself his family hadn't seen in a very long time.

*“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son’” (Luke 15:21).*

## **lavishing love**

*“But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate” (Luke 15:22-24).*

Now that's love. Forgiveness. Family. The man had waited patiently, and now the boy re-joined the family. Not only are the father's arms open wide, but he does everything he can to show the wayward soul he's not only come home again; all his status as son is restored. The ring and robe show his blessing and affirmation of the boy's place in the family. His inheritance money might have been spent, but his family line hadn't been destroyed. Nothing could destroy the love of a father.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Devlin, J. (2011). [\*Choosing to run: jonah's encounter with god's grace\*](#). Nashville: Randall House.

## The Promise of a King

David and Jonathan were like two keys on a piano keyboard. Alone they made music, but together they made harmony. Jonathan “loved David as much as he loved himself” (1 Sam. 20:17). Their legendary friendship met its ultimate test the day David learned that Saul was trying to kill him. Jonathan pledged to save David and asked his friend one favor in return: “You must never stop showing your kindness to my family, even when the LORD has destroyed all your enemies from the earth. So, Jonathan made an agreement with David” (1 Sam. 20:15–16).

Don’t you know this was a tender memory for David? Can’t you imagine him reflecting on this moment years later? Standing on the balcony overlooking the safe city. Astride his steed riding through the abundant fields. Dressed in armor inspecting his capable army. Were there times when he was overwhelmed with gratitude? Were there times when he thought,

*Had it not been for Jonathan saving my life, none of this would have happened? Perhaps such a reflection moment prompted him to turn to his servants and ask, “Is anyone still left in Saul’s family? I want to show kindness to that person for Jonathan’s sake!” (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 9: 1).*

Those in the grip of grace are known to ask such questions. Can’t I do something for somebody? Can’t I be kind to someone because others have been kind to me? This isn’t a political maneuver. David isn’t seeking to do good to be applauded by people. Nor is he doing something good so someone will do something for him. He is driven by the singular thought that he, too, was once weak. And in his weakness he was helped. David, while hiding from Saul, qualified for Paul’s epitaph, “when we were unable to help ourselves” (Romans 5:6).

David was delivered; now he desires to do the same. A servant named Ziba knows of a descendant. “Jonathan has a son still living who is crippled in both feet.’ The king asked Ziba, ‘Where is this son?’ Ziba answered, ‘He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar’” (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 9: 3–4).

Just one sentence and David knew he had more than he bargained for. The boy was “crippled in both feet.” David’s only response was, “Where is this son?” (v. 4).

*This son. One wonders how long it had been since Mephibosheth was referred to as a son. In all previous references he was called a cripple. Every mention of him thus far is followed by his handicap. But the words of David make no mention of his affliction. He doesn’t ask, “Where is Mephibosheth, this problem child?” but rather asks, “Where is this son?”*

Many of you know what it’s like to carry a stigma. Each time your name is mentioned, your calamity follows. Isn’t there anyone who sees you for who you are and not what you did? Yes. There is One who does. Your King. When God speaks of you, he doesn’t mention your plight, pain, or problem; he lets you share his glory. He calls you his child.

He will not always accuse us,  
and he will not be angry forever.  
He has not punished us as our sins should be punished;

he has not repaid us for the evil we have done.  
As high as the sky is above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who respect him.  
He has taken our sins away from us  
as far as the east is from the west.  
The LORD has mercy on those who respect him,  
as a father has mercy on his children.  
He knows how we were made;  
he remembers that we are dust. (Psalms 103:9–14)

Mephibosheth carried his stigma for twenty years. When people mentioned his name, they mentioned his problem. But when the king mentioned his name, he called him “son.” And one word from the palace offsets a thousand voices in the streets.

David’s couriers journeyed to Mephibosheth’s door, carried him to a chariot, and escorted him to the palace. He was taken before the king, where he bowed facedown on the floor and confessed, “I am your servant” (2 Sam. 9:6). His fear is understandable. Though he may have been told that David was kind, what assurance did he have? Though the emissaries surely told him that David meant no harm, he was afraid. (Wouldn’t you be?) The anxiety was on the face that faced the floor. David’s first words to him were, “**Don’t be afraid.**”

By the way, your king has been known to say the same. Are you aware that the most repeated command from the lips of Jesus was, “Fear not”? Are you aware that the command from heaven not to be afraid appears in every book of the Bible?

Mephibosheth had been called, found, and rescued, but he still needed assurance. Don’t we all? Don’t we, like the trembling guest, need assurance that we are bowing before a gracious king? Paul says we have that assurance. The apostle points to the cross as our guarantee of God’s love. “God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). God proved his love for us by sacrificing his Son.

Formerly God had sent prophets to preach: Now he has sent his son to die. Earlier God commissioned angels to aid, now he has offered his son to redeem. When we tremble he points us to the splattered blood on the splintered beams and says, “Don’t be afraid.”

During the early days of the Civil War a Union soldier was arrested on charges of desertion. Unable to prove his innocence, he was condemned and sentenced to die a deserter’s death. His appeal found its way to the desk of Abraham Lincoln. The president felt mercy for the soldier and signed a pardon. The soldier returned to service, fought the entirety of the war, and was killed in the last battle. Found within his breast pocket was the signed letter of the president. Close to the heart of the soldier were his leader’s words of pardon. He had found **courage in grace**. I wonder how many thousands more have found courage in the emblazoned cross of their king.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). [\*In the grip of grace\*](#) (pp. 99–103). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

## The Privilege of Adoption

Just as David kept his promise to Jonathan, so God keeps his promise to us. The name Mephibosheth means “he who scatters shame.” And that is exactly what David intended to do for the young prince. In swift succession David returned to Mephibosheth all his land, crops, and servants and then insisted that the cripple eat at the king’s table. Not just once but four times!

*“I will give you back all the land of your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”*

*“Mephibosheth...will always eat at my table.”*

*“So, Mephibosheth ate at David’s table as if he were one of the king’s sons.”*

*“Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table. And he was crippled in both feet.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 9:7, 10, 11, 13 italics mine)*

Pause and envision the scene in the royal dining room. May I turn my pen over to Charles Swindoll to assist you?

The dinner bell rings through the king’s palace and David comes to the head of the table and sits down. In a few moments Amnon—clever, crafty, Amnon—sits to the left of David. Lovely and gracious Tamar, a charming and beautiful young woman, arrives and sits beside Amnon. And then across the way, Solomon walks slowly from his study; precocious, brilliant, preoccupied Solomon. The heir apparent slowly sits down. And then Absalom—handsome, winsome Absalom with beautiful flowing hair, black as a raven, down to his shoulders—sits down. That particular evening Joab, the courageous warrior and David’s commander of the troops, has been invited to dinner. Muscular, bronzed Joab is seated near the king. Afterward they wait. They hear the shuffling of feet, the clump, clump, clump of the crutches as Mephibosheth rather awkwardly finds his place at the table and slips into his seat and the tablecloth covers his feet. **I ask you: Did Mephibosheth understand grace?**

And I ask you, do you see our story in his?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). [\*In the grip of grace\*](#) (pp. 103–106). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.



## Answering the Greatest Question

### SOLOMON

*Say the name Solomon and you have spoken of wisdom. Solomon's name is synonymous with wealth and power and splendor. He built the temple of God that was a marvel to the ancient world. His father was known as a warrior, but Solomon became renowned for his wisdom, his possessions, and the blessings of God.*

*Solomon is also known for excess. He had many wives and concubines. He ran toward women and their gods. Idolatry. This man knew wisdom and could discern. For two women who both said they were mother to a child, Solomon passed the judgment to cut the baby in half. The reaction of the two women uncovered the truth about their hearts and revealed the real mother.*

*Unfortunately, Solomon's heart remained divided, and the kingdom of Israel would fall to the same fate after his death. His own family members would fight against each other for control of the throne after his father, David, died. Chaos and strife rained down on the lot of them, as if the sins of others were being visited, along with the abundant blessings of God.*

*But early in the reign of this king, a conversation with God showed a different perspective of the man. Though Solomon would run toward excess, God would ask a penetrating question and Solomon would respond with amazing insight into the heart of God.*

God appeared to Solomon and said, "Ask. What should I give you?" Another translation says, "Ask what you wish Me to give you" (1 Kings 3:5 NASB).

This was not a blank check, it was a gut check. This was not God as genie, but God testing what was really in Solomon's heart. What he was really longing for. The question exposed Solomon like no other. It's interesting to note that this is not asked of Solomon in a waking moment but in a dream as God peers deeply into the life of this son of an adulterer, a son of a man after God's own heart, the son of a divided father.

Here's what we find in Solomon's heart:

And Solomon replied, "You have shown great and faithful love to Your servant, my father David, because he walked before You in faithfulness, righteousness, and integrity. You have continued this great and faithful love for him by giving him a son to sit on his throne, as it is today.

"Lord my God, You have now made Your servant king in my father David's place. Yet I am just a youth with no experience in leadership. Your servant is among Your people You have chosen, a people too numerous to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an obedient heart to judge Your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"

Solomon's answer pleased God. In it, Solomon uncovered his greatest need, his inability. He was admitting he wasn't up to the task of leading the Israelites. He humbled himself, and God

loves a humble heart. Solomon begins his answer understanding his relation to God. In essence he was saying, "You are God, and I am not. I am in need, and You are the only one who can enable me to accomplish what the nation needs."

When you come to God with this attitude, He will hear and answer.

After acknowledging his need, Solomon gives God his request. He was not timid. He didn't hold back. *You have not because you ask not.* Solomon could have asked for many things, but his request went below the surface to what he needed most. He asked for discernment, an ability to tell right from wrong.

Solomon could have asked for anything under the sun, but he admitted he was deficient and asked for help. Down deep, underneath all of the striving and finagling, underneath the layers of family dysfunction and the addictions, Solomon's heart yearned for true wisdom. And God gave it, plus more.

This is God's grace poured out. This is God responding to a request from a willing heart. So God said to him, "Because you have requested this and did not ask for long life or riches for yourself, or the death of your enemies, but you asked discernment for yourself to understand justice, I will therefore do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has never been anyone like you before and never will be again. In addition, I will give you what you did not ask for: both riches and honor, so that no man in any kingdom will be your equal during your entire life. If you walk in My ways and keep My statutes and commands just as your father David did, I will give you a long life." Then Solomon woke up and realized it had been a dream.

But God's grace was real. And He did what He said He would do. And He will do the same in your life.

No matter how far you've run from Him, no matter how much value you have placed in things or health or wealth, God is ready to welcome you and give wisdom for the tasks ahead. He is willing to extend His grace.

Sadly, when Solomon grew older, this wise man who was king of Israel ended up marrying hundreds of pagan women and bringing them into the land of Israel. He did not obey God. His heart was divided as the kingdom he passed to his descendants.

And yet, this is an ancestor of Jesus. This is the lineage of the grace of God.

Who are you? What is it you want from God? He is offering His grace, right now.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Chapman, G., & Fabry, C. (2013). [\*Extraordinary grace: how the unlikely lineage of Jesus reveals God's amazing love\*](#). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

## God's Grace in the Old Testament

*Boyd Sellers*

I HAVE A FRIEND WHOSE CONCEPT OF GOD is divided. He sees God in the Old Testament as an intolerant, vicious “warmonger,” without mercy, offering no grace, and leaving death and destruction in His path. Then, in the New Testament, he sees God as an over-tolerant “Father” whose only characteristic is “love,” who endures and accepts any belief or action, and would never punish anybody for anything.

Of course, both views of God are extreme and false. Though His covenants have changed, God's nature has not changed. He remains, as always, the gracious God who rewards obedience and punishes rebellion and disobedience.

One of the clearest examples of God's grace in the Old Testament is that of Noah and his generation. The people of Noah's day had become so wicked that they *deserved* to die—“every imagination of the thoughts of their heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). The situation “grieved” God and He determined to give man what he *deserved*—“I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth” (Genesis 6:7). “But Noah found *grace*” (verse 8). And even though the men of his generation *deserved* to die, God provided a way through Noah for them to be saved. In His grace, God gave them *time* to repent. He provided a *man* with a message of salvation (2 Peter 2:5) and He devised the *means* by which they could avoid certain destruction in the flood. Keep in mind: They deserved death! But the amazing grace of God held out an offer of salvation to wicked, rebellious men.

Noah's example also illustrates the fact that God's offer of grace can be refused. The fact that God provided a *way* for lost men to be saved did not mean that all would be saved. In fact *most* refused His gracious offer. Peter tells us that “few, that is eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:20). Only eight people accepted the gift of God's grace.

From a more “general” standpoint there are at least four basic areas where the grace of God stands out in His dealings with His Old Testament people, Israel.

**First, it was grace that provided them with a law that showed them how men ought to live.** Knowing that “the way of man is not in himself” (Jeremiah 10:23), they, like men in every age, needed a word from God to show them how to live. Though some may have viewed it otherwise, God's law was not given to unduly restrict or to keep them from “enjoying life.” In fact, just the opposite was true. Moses said, “And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes ... *for our good always*” (Deuteronomy 6:24). God knew what they needed! He knew what was best, and He graciously gave them a law *for their good*. Here was the word that would keep them from the pitfalls that were destroying the heathen. It was not merited, deserved, or earned. The Law of God to guide was a gift of God's grace.

**Second, it was grace that provided for their necessities.** Some of the estimates of daily requirements of food and water for the traveling Israelites are astounding. But the gracious God provided. Jeremiah observed that it was Jehovah who “brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt” (Jeremiah 2:6).

If it had not been for God's provision, they would have perished!! And His provisions were not out of debt—He *owed* them nothing! His provisions were unearned, unmerited, undeserved. It was often the case that if God had given this rebellious, faithless, stubborn people what they *deserved*, He would have left them alone to perish in the wilderness. But He provided. Amazing grace!

**Third, even in chastening, God's grace was evident.** David was thankful for it (Psalm 119:71) and Asaph, though he had difficulty learning to appreciate God's chastening, was made to realize how essential it was for his well-being (see Psalm 73). When the Kingdom of Judah had filled to the brim its cup of iniquity, God chastened severely with the 70-year Babylonian captivity. But even in chastening, God said, "I know the plans that I have for you ..., plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11, NASV). There would have been no hope without the chastening of the gracious God.

**Finally, God's grace is nowhere more evident than in His willingness to forgive when an erring son repented and returned humbly to Him.** Whether it was the people of Nineveh (Jonah 4:2) or a "man after God's own heart" (Psalm 32:5), Jehovah waited with open arms ready and willing to forgive.

The amazing grace of God is written on every page of the Old Testament. With David all could say, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10)—"Gracious is the Lord" (Psalm 116:5).

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<sup>10</sup> Sellers, B. (1984). [God's Grace in the Old Testament](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 13.

## The Bible—God’s Grace Communicated

Vaughn D. Shofner

MAN IS THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS, THE acme of God’s creation. “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion ... over all the earth.... So, God created man in his own image ... male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:26–27). In revealing the qualifications of man in order to possess sovereignty and similarity to God, Genesis 2:7 says, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

When man was created of the dust of the ground, his tangible form was only a composition of atoms, physical matter, and was not the likeness of God who is a spirit. But when the breath of God animated him as a living soul, then man was endowed with the likeness of God. He had received a direct afflatus from the Spirit of Elohim, and had conferred upon him a *communication* from the whole personality of the Godhead.

Since man was thus created and endowed with rational intelligence, man must be accountable to rational intelligence. Thus, by God’s laws of procreation, man reached the place of creation’s completeness and was able to understand intelligible information—to think connectedly, to reach rational conclusions, to exercise volition and to direct his behavior accordingly. In the God-planted garden the orally-communicated information from God gave man whatever was necessary to the exercise of his intellectual abilities and his complete happiness and welfare. But when contrary information was given by the Serpent, the use of it in man’s reasoning process produced incorrect conclusions that led to sinful behavior. Man lost his personal communion with God as he was driven from God’s presence because of his sin.

Though man was lifted by God’s grace to the highest echelon of creation, he was now separated from the association and communication with his Creator. He faced impenetrable perplexities all around him. He beheld the symmetry of the universe: the uniformity that guides the succession of seasons and controls the constant rotation of night and day; he learned the exact motions of heavenly bodies, the ebb and flow of the seas, and he concluded that there were great powers and wisdom in such marvelous works. But when he observed the air in destructive whirlwinds, and the earthquakes which threatened to reduce all nature to chaos, his thoughts and imaginations were frustrated.

With no information supplied but from the natural universe, man saw that the earth was supplied with many good things and that he enjoyed sovereignty in this natural palace. He saw how minutely power and wisdom tailored the things of nature to the makeup of the human body—air to the needs of breathing, things tangibly visible to the eyes, sounds communicated to the ears. He noticed that his nature connected him to his own species instead of animals of

another kind, and he understood the distribution of abilities which required some to seek the assistance of others, and that sympathy leads to the relief of others in pain or need. He must have concluded that wisdom and power behind all of these realities comes from a being of great beneficence. But when he met the innumerable miseries to which man is subject, and attempted to reckon with the maladies that consume man; when he was faced with the terrors of death which lowers the loftiest head, dissolves the strongest ties, and destroys the highest positions—then without help of comforting information he wondered about the purpose of existence.

However, man was not left to an enigmatic existence troubled with doubt, dismay and frustration. There can be no friendly existence of animation without direction, order, and therefore at the very instant the all-wise Creator endowed man with His likeness He *communicated* to him with intelligible utterances which appealed to his intellectual makeup in the appointment of laws of duty and privilege: “Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28). Thus, from the beginning man has been given the privilege of exercising his abilities by the intelligible appointments of his Creator.

Today the communicated intelligence of Jehovah God reveals that humanity is both physical and spiritual; that is, “The dust shall return to earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The Bible unfolds the mystery of the duties of man, attributes the way of corruption to the deceptive plots of the devil, and reveals the knowledge of the duration of man whose living spirit need not be involved in the decaying ruins of matter.

God’s revelation dissipates all our obscurities and informs us without doubt that our Creator wills for us immortal bliss rather than eternal punishment. By this communication our thoughts are transported to a future and eternal state to which the plaintive pleas of God’s warnings and promises tend. It commands us to accept the blessings of this life, but at the same time to reject the most magnificent earthly objects—the world’s pride in crowns, scepters, kingdoms and pleasures—as being unfit to provide the felicity of souls created in the image of the blessed God.

So, gentle reader, as our earthly existence is by the excellence and favor of God, our salvation from the soul-destroying shambles of sin and failures is by the grace of God. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11–13).

O Lord, give us strength that we may never forget the exalted privileges granted by Thy excellence and favor to man from creation; and that now we are permitted to live in the full light of Thy glorious gospel, and can come boldly to Thy throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to bear us through our trying times.

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<sup>11</sup> Shofner, V. D. (1984). [The Bible—God’s Grace Communicated](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 16.

## The Mercy and Grace of God

by Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

The academic discipline of Christian apologetics is concerned with offering a reasoned defense of historical, New Testament Christianity. The English word “apology” derives from the Greek *apologia*, which means to “defend” or “make a defense.” Various biblical writers acknowledged the legitimacy of such activity. The apostle Peter, for example, wrote:

But sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord: being ready always to give answer [Greek, *apologian*] to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians, stated that he was “set for the defense [Greek, *apologian*] of the Gospel” (Philippians 1:16). Paul’s writings, in fact, teem with sound arguments that provide a rational undergirding for his readers’ faith. Christianity is not some kind of vague, emotionally based belief system intended for unthinking simpletons. Rather, it is a logical system of thought that may be both defended and accepted by analytical minds.

In any defense of Christianity, a variety of evidence may be employed. Such evidence may be derived from science, philosophy, or history, to list just a few examples. It is not uncommon to hear someone mention studies from within the field of “Christian evidences.” Such terminology simply is a reference to an examination of the evidences establishing Christianity as the one true religion of the one true God. Regardless of the source or nature of the evidence, however, the ultimate goal is to substantiate the case for the existence of God, the inspiration of the Bible, the deity and Sonship of Christ, the validity of the creation account found in Genesis 1-2, etc.

Much of the evidence attending the truthfulness of Christianity can be examined within broad categories such as those listed above. But these do not tell the whole story, for within each major area of study there are important subcategories that offer additional insight. An illustration of this point would be a study of the inspiration of the Bible. It is possible to examine various arguments that establish the Bible as being God’s inspired Word. Generally speaking, however, such a study may not examine such things as alleged internal contradictions, supposed historical inconsistencies, and other such matters. In order to respond to such charges, one must “dig a little deeper” into the evidence at hand.

The same is true of the evidence that establishes the case for the existence of God. It is not a difficult task to assemble evidence that represents a compelling case for God’s existence. Yet that evidence often may not touch on other equally important matters that have to do with God’s personality and character (e.g., things like His eternity, His justice, His relationship to other members of the Godhead, etc.). Information on these topics must be derived from separate, independent studies.

One of the areas that Christian apologetics seeks to address in relation to the existence of God is His **nature**. It is not enough merely to acknowledge that God exists. Rather, it is necessary to know something about Him, what He expects from mankind, and how He interacts with His creation. By necessity, any investigation into the nature of God eventually will have to address the topics of His justice, His mercy, and His grace, because these are a part of His eternal nature. That is the purpose of the present study.

## THE MERCY AND GRACE OF GOD

The mercy and grace of God are at the core of one of the most beautiful, yet one of the most heart-rending, accounts in all the Bible—the story of Peter’s denial of His Lord, and Jesus’ reaction to that denial. Christ had predicted that before His crucifixion Peter would deny Him three times (John 13:36-38). Peter did just that (John 18:25-27). First, he was asked by a maid who controlled the door to the court of the high priest if he was a disciple of Jesus. Peter denied that he was. Second, he was asked by servants of the high priest if he was indeed the Lord’s disciple. Again, he denied knowing Jesus. Third, he was asked if he was with the Lord when they arrested Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. One last time, Peter vehemently denied the Lord. The cock crowed, and the Lord looked across the courtyard. As their eyes met, the text says simply that Peter “went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61-62).

When next we see Peter, he has given up. In fact, he said “I go a fishing” (John 21:3). Peter’s life as a follower of Christ was finished, so far as he was concerned. He had decided to go back to his livelihood of fishing. No doubt Peter felt that his sin against the Lord was so grievous that even though he now believed the Lord to be risen, there could be no further use for him in the kingdom. It was, then, to his original vocation that he would return.

It is a compliment to Peter’s innate leadership ability that the other disciples followed him even on this occasion. As Peter and his friends fished one morning, the Lord appeared on the shore and called to them. When they brought the boat near, they saw that Christ had prepared a meal of fish and bread over an open fire. They sat, ate, and talked. As they did, the Lord asked Peter, “Simon, lovest thou me more than these?” (John 21:15). Peter assured Christ that he did. But Christ appeared unsatisfied with Peter’s response. He inquired a second time, and a third. After the last query, the text indicates that Peter was “grieved because Christ said unto him a third time, ‘lovest thou me?’ ” (John 21:17).

Peter’s uneasiness was saying, in essence, “What are you trying to do to me, Lord?” Jesus was asking: “Peter, can you comprehend—in spite of your denying heart—that I have forgiven you? Do you understand that the mercy and grace of God have been extended to you? There is still work for you to do. Go, use your immense talents in the advancement of the kingdom.” Jesus loved Peter. And He wanted him back. Jesus simply was putting into action that which He had taught personally. Forgive, yes, even 70 times 7 times!

Perhaps during these events one of Christ’s parables came to Peter’s mind. He no doubt was familiar with the teaching of the Lord in Luke 7:36-50 (see the similar account found in Matthew 18:23-35). Jesus was eating with Simon, a Pharisee. Simon saw a worldly woman come into the Lord’s presence, and thought: “This man, if he were a prophet, would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, that she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). Simon’s point, of course, was that Christ should have driven away the sinful woman. But Jesus, knowing Simon’s thoughts, presented a parable for his consideration.

Two servants owed their lord; one owed an enormous debt, and the other only a small amount. Yet the master forgave both of the debts. Jesus asked Simon: “Which of them therefore will love him the most?” (Luke 7:42). Simon correctly answered: “He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most” (Luke 7:43). Jesus, through this parable, was saying to Simon: “I came here today and you would not even extend to me the common courtesy of washing my feet. This woman entered, cried, washed my feet with her tears, and dried them with her hair. I have forgiven her. She, therefore, should love me the most.”

This woman had been a recipient of God’s mercy and grace. She gratefully expressed devotion for the forgiveness offered by the Son of God. Simon was too religious to beg, and



too proud to accept it if offered. It is a sad fact that man will treat forgiveness lightly so long as he treats sin lightly. The worldly, fallen woman desperately desired the saving mercy and grace of God, and accepted it when it was extended. Christ's point to Simon was that man can appreciate **to what** he has been elevated (God's saving grace) only when he recognizes **from what** he has been saved (his own sinful state).

In this context, Christ's point to Peter becomes clear. "Peter, you denied me, not just once, but three times. Have I forgiven you? Yes, I have." Peter, too, had been the recipient of God's mercy and grace. He had much of which to be forgiven. Yet, **he had been forgiven!** The problem that relates to mercy and grace is not to be found in heaven; rather, it is to be found here on the Earth. Man's first problem often is accepting God's mercy and grace. His second problem often is forgiving himself. We do not stand in need of an accuser; God's law does that admirably, as the seventh chapter of Romans demonstrates. What we need is an Advocate (1 John 2:1-2)—someone to stand in our place, and to plead our case. We—laden with our burden of sin—have no right to stand before the majestic throne of God, even with the intent to beg for mercy. But Jesus the Righteous has that right. He made it clear to His disciples, and likewise has made it clear to us, that He is willing to be just such an Advocate on our behalf. The author of the book of Hebrews wrote:

Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (4:14-15).

The entire story of the Bible centers on man's need for mercy and grace. That story began in Genesis 3, and has been unfolding ever since. Fortunately, "the Lord is full of pity, and merciful" (James 5:11). Even when Cain—a man who had murdered his own brother—begged for mercy, God heard his plea and placed a mark on him for his protection. God never has wanted to punish anyone. His words to this effect were recorded by Ezekiel: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord Jehovah; and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?... I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord Jehovah" (18:23,32). Similarly, in the times of Hosea sin was rampant. Life was barren. Worship to God had been polluted. The effects of Satan's rule were felt everywhere on the Earth. The Lord, suggested Hosea, "hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land" (4:1). Evidence of God's mercy and grace is seen, however, in the words spoken by Hosea on God's behalf:

How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim! How shall I cast thee off, Israel!... my heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee; and I will not come in wrath (11:8-9).

The wise king, Solomon, said that those who practice mercy and truth will find "favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man" (Proverbs 3:4). Many are those in the Bible who desperately sought the mercy and grace of God. Cain needed mercy and grace. Israel needed mercy and grace. Peter needed mercy and grace. And to all it was given, as God deemed appropriate. We must come to understand, however, several important facts about God's mercy and grace.

## God is Sovereign in His Delegation of Mercy and Grace

First, we must realize that God is sovereign in granting both His mercy and His grace. When we speak of God's sovereign nature, it is a recognition on our part that whatever He wills is

right. He alone determines the appropriate course of action; He acts and speaks at the whim of no outside force, including mankind.

When humans become the recipients of heaven's grace, the unfathomable has happened. The apostle Paul wrote: "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.... For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 3:23; 6:23). God—our Justifiable Accuser—has become our Vindicator. He has extended to us His wonderful love, as expressed by His mercy and His grace.

Mercy has been defined as feeling "sympathy with the misery of another, and especially sympathy manifested in act" (Vine, 1940, 3:61). Mercy is more than just sympathetic feelings. It is sympathy in concert with action. Grace often has been defined as the "unmerited favor of God." If grace is unmerited, then none can claim it as an unalienable right. If grace is undeserved, then none is entitled to it. If grace is a gift, then none can demand it. Grace is the antithesis of justice. After God's grace has been meted out, there remains only divine justice. Because salvation is through grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), the very chief of sinners is not beyond the reach of divine grace. Because salvation is by grace, boasting is excluded and God receives the glory.

When justice is meted out, we **receive what we deserve**. When mercy is extended, we **do not receive what we deserve**. When grace is bestowed, we **receive what we do not deserve**.

Perhaps no one could appreciate this better than Peter. It was he who said: "And if the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18). Paul reminded the first-century Christians in Rome that "scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7-8).

Yet because it is a free gift, and unearned, it remains within God's sovereign right to bestow it as He sees fit. A beautiful expression of this fact can be seen in the prayers of two men who found themselves in similar circumstances—in that both were under the sentence of death. In Numbers 20, the story is told of God's commanding Moses to speak to the rock in the wilderness, so that it would yield water for the Israelites. Rather than obey the command of God to speak to the rock, however, Moses struck it instead. The Lord said to him: "Because ye believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them" (Numbers 20:12). Years later, God called Moses to the top of Mount Nebo, and allowed him to look across into the promised land, but He vowed that Moses would not enter into Canaan with the Israelites. Moses begged God to permit him to go (Deuteronomy 3:26), but his plea was denied.

Yet king Hezekiah, likewise under a sentence of death, petitioned God to let him live, and God added 15 years to his life. Moses wrote: "The Lord would not hear me....," and died. But to Hezekiah it was said: "I have heard thy prayer" (2 Kings 20:1-6), and his life was spared. What a beautiful illustration and amplification of Romans 9:15: "For he saith unto Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." God is sovereign in His mercy and His grace.

## God's Grace Does Not Mean a Lack of Consequences to Sin

Second, we must recognize that God's granting mercy and grace does not somehow negate the consequences of sin here and now. While mercy may ensue, so may sin's consequences. Perhaps the most touching story in the Bible of this eternal truth is the story of king David.

How could a man of David's faith and righteousness commit the terrible sins attributed to him? David was about 50 years old at the time. Fame and fortune were his as Israel's popular, beloved king. He had taken his vows before God (see Psalm 101). He had insisted on righteousness in his nation. The people had been taught to love, respect, and honor the God of heaven. David, their king, was also their example. He was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

But he committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12), and then had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, murdered. One cannot help but be reminded of the sin of Achan (Joshua 7), when he took booty from a war and hid it under the floor of his tent after the Israelites were commanded specifically not to take any such items. Achan said, "I saw..., I coveted..., I took..., I hid..." (Joshua 7:21). Is that not what king David did? But Achan and David also could state, "I paid." Achan paid with his life; David paid with twenty years of strife, heartbreak, and the loss of a child that meant everything to him.

Nathan the prophet was sent by God to the great king. He told David the story of a rich man who had many sheep in his flock, and of a poor man who had but one small ewe that was practically part of the family. When a visitor appeared at the rich man's door, the rich man took the single ewe owned by the poor man, and slaughtered it for the visitor's meal. Upon hearing what had happened, David was incensed with anger and vowed, "As Jehovah liveth, the man that hath done this is worthy to die" (2 Samuel 12:5).

Nathan looked the powerful king in the eye and said, "Thou art the man" (2 Samuel 12:7). The enormity of David's sin swept over him, and he said, "I have sinned" (2 Samuel 12:13). David, even through his sin, was a man who loved righteousness. Now that Nathan had shown him his sin, he felt a repulsion which demanded a cleansing that could come only from God. His description of the consequences of sin on the human heart is one of the most vivid in all of Scripture, and should move each of us deeply. His agonizing prayer is recorded in Psalm 51. David cried out: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness."

David needed a new heart; sin had defiled his old one. He likewise realized that he needed to undergo an inner renewal; pride and lust had destroyed his spirit. So, David prayed for a proper spirit. He could do nothing but cast himself on the mercy and grace of God. David laid on the altar his own sinful heart and begged God to cleanse, recreate, and restore his life. God did forgive. He did cleanse. He did recreate. He did restore.

But the consequences of David's sin still remained. The child growing in Bathsheba's womb died after birth. In addition, the prophet Nathan made it clear to David that "the sword shall never depart from thy house," and that God would "raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (2 Samuel 12:10-11). David's life never would be the same again. His child was dead. His reputation was damaged. His influence, in large part, was destroyed.

David learned that the penalty for personal sin often is felt in the lives of others as well. He had prayed that those who loved and served the Lord would not have to bear his shame. But this was not to be. The shame of the one is the shame of the many; as God's people, we are bound together. More often than not, what affects one of us affects all of us.

It is to David's credit that once his sin was uncovered, he did not try to deny it. Solomon, his son, later would write: "He that covereth his transgressions shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall obtain mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

## Mercy and Grace are Expensive

Third, we should realize that the mercy and grace God uses to cover mankind's sins are not cheap. They cost heaven its finest jewel—the Son of God. The popular, old song says it well:

I owed a debt I could not pay  
He paid a debt He did not owe  
I needed someone to wash my sins away.  
So now I sing a brand new song—amazing grace  
Christ paid the debt I could never pay.

Jesus' death represented His total commitment to us. As Isaiah prophesied:

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.... He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (53:4-6,12).

Paul wrote that "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Grace does not **eliminate** human responsibility; rather, grace **emphasizes** human responsibility. Grace, because it cost God so much, delivers agonizing duties and obligations. It is seemingly a great paradox that Christianity is free, yet at the same time is so very costly. Jesus warned: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). Paul summarized it like this: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself up for me. I do not make void the grace of God" (Galatians 2:20-21).

Grace does not make one **irresponsible**; it makes one **more responsible**! Paul asked: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid" (Romans 6:1-2). God's grace is accessed through willful obedience to the "perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). It is God's law that informs us of the availability of grace, the manner in which we appropriate it, and the blessings of living within it. The testimony of Scripture is abundantly clear when it speaks of the importance of the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5). We are to be obedient to God by returning to Him from an alien, sinful state, and, once redeemed, through our continued faithfulness as evinced by our works. Grace and works of obedience are not mutually exclusive.

Neither are grace and law mutually exclusive. One who is "in Christ" does not live under the dominion of sin, since Christianity is a system of grace. The apostle to the Gentiles stated: "Ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Romans 6:14). He cannot mean that we are under no law at all, because in the following verses he spoke of early Christians being "obedient from the heart to that form of teaching" delivered to them (6:17). These Christians obeyed God's law, and were living faithfully under that law. They understood that "faith worketh by love" (Galatians 5:6). The terms "law," "works," and "grace" are not at odds, but like all things within God's plan, exist in perfect harmony.

## We Are Saved Through Grace

Fourth, let us remember that our salvation is by atonement, not attainment. Because salvation is a free gift (Romans 6:23), man never can earn it. Unmerited favor cannot be merited! God did for us what we, on our own, could not do. Jesus paid the price we could not

pay. From beginning to end, the scheme of redemption—including all that God has done, is doing, and will do—is one continuous act of grace. The Scriptures speak of God “reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses, and having committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Peter stated:

Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers; but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

God has promised mercy and grace to those who believe on His Son (John 3:16), repent of their sins (Luke 13:3), and have those sins remitted through baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16). Subsequent to the Day of Pentecost, Peter called upon his audiences to: “Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). The word for “blotted out” derives from the Greek word meaning to “wipe out, erase, or obliterate.” The New Testament uses the word to refer to “blotting out” the old law (Colossians 2:14), and to “blotting out” a person’s name from the Book of Life (Revelation 3:5). One of the great prophetic utterances of the Old Testament was that “their sin will I remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

Our sins were borne by Jesus on the cross. He paid our debt so that we, like undeserving Barabbas, might be set free. In this way, God could be just, and at the same time Justifier of those who believe in and obey His Son. By refusing to extend mercy to Jesus on the cross, God was able to extend mercy to me—if I submit in obedience to His commands.

There was no happy solution to the justice/mercy dilemma. There was no way by which God could remain just (justice demands that the wages of sin be paid), and yet save His Son from death. Christ was abandoned to the cross so that mercy could be extended to sinners who stood condemned (Galatians 3:10). God could not save sinners by fiat—upon the ground of mere authority alone—without violating His own attribute of divine justice. Paul discussed God’s response to this problem in Romans 3:24-26:

Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood...for the showing of his righteousness...that he might himself be just and the justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus.

Man’s salvation was no arbitrary arrangement. God did not decide merely to consider man a sinner, and then determine to save him upon a principle of mercy. Sin placed man in a state of antagonism toward God. Sinners are condemned because they have violated God’s law, and because God’s justice cannot permit Him to ignore sin. Sin could be forgiven only as a result of the vicarious death of God’s Son. Because sinners are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, and not their own righteousness, they are sanctified by the mercy and grace of God.

## Our Response to Mercy and Grace

What, then, should be our response to mercy and grace?

(1) Let us remember that “blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). It is a biblical principle that unless we extend mercy, we cannot obtain mercy. Jesus taught: “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). We would do well to recall the adage that “he who cannot forgive destroys the bridge over which he also must one day pass.” If we expect to be forgiven, then let us be prepared to forgive.

(2) Let us remember that mercy and grace demand action on our part. Mercy is to feel “sympathy with the misery of another, and especially sympathy manifested in act.” Luke recorded an example of Christ’s mercy in healing ten lepers who “lifted up their voices saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us’ ” (Luke 17:13). Did these diseased and dying men want merely a few kind words uttered in their direction? Hardly. They wanted to be healed! When the publican prayed so penitently, “God, be thou merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13), he was asking for more than tender feelings of compassion. He wanted something done about his pitiful condition. Mercy and grace are compassion in action.

(3) Let us remember that nothing must take precedence over our Savior. If we have to choose between Christ and a friend, spouse, or child, Christ comes first. He demands no less (Luke 4:25-35)—but His demands are consistent with His sufferings on our behalf. He insists that we take up our cross: He took up His. He insists that we lose our life to find it: He lost His. He insists that we give up our families for His sake: He gave up His for ours. He demands that we give up everything for Him: He had nowhere to lay His head, and His only possession—the robe on His back—was taken from Him. Yes, the costs sometimes are high; but the blessings that we receive in return are priceless. He dispenses mercy and grace, and offers eternal salvation to all those who will believe in and obey Him.

## CONCLUSION

In Luke 15, Jesus spoke of a wayward son who had sinned against his father and squandered his precious inheritance. Upon returning home, he decided to say to his father: “make me as one of thy hired servants” (15:19). He was prepared for the worst.

But he received the best. His father, “while he was yet afar off,...was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). The son did not receive what he **deserved**; he received **what he did not deserve**. He received mercy and grace. His father wanted him back!

Does our heavenly Father want us back? Oh, yes! Paul wrote: “For ye were bought with a price” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Let us yearn for the day when we can stand before His throne and thank Him for granting us mercy and grace—and for paying the debt we could not pay, and the debt He did not owe.

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## Grace

*"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." ([1 John 3:1](#))*

Grace, as we see it developed in the New Testament, was unknown in the Old Testament. Certainly God's grace was showered on objects of His favor, but His loving kindness, mercy, and mighty hand could hardly be compared to His unmerited salvation, justification, faith, and spiritual gifts.

The New Testament word for grace, *charis*, had a classical meaning. Aristotle defined it as "conferring freely with no expectation of return, and finding its only motive in the bounty and free heartedness of the giver." The recipient of this act was always a friend, but New Testament usage gave fuller, richer, extended meaning to the word. Note the following "gracious" response of even Christian servants to their unkind masters: "For this is thankworthy [i.e., *charis*], if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. . . . if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable [*charis*] with God" ([1 Peter 2:19-20](#)).

But Christ went even further. When He extended His grace, it was not just to friends, nor even to unjust slave owners, but to bitter enemies. He left heaven with a cruel cross in sight for such filthy worms as us, saturated with sin, ungrateful, rebellious, with nothing of worth. The sins of the objects of His grace would nail Him to the tree, and yet He came. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us," our text states. Literally, the phrase reads, "What foreign kind of love." This kind of love and grace is not human; it could only come from the heart of a gracious God. Man could never imagine a scheme of salvation such as substitutionary atonement, where God Himself would die for sinners, where no worth or works on the part of man were involved. This is true grace, a foreign kind of love. JDM

A phrase used by both Peter and Paul has become one of my favorite images from the New Testament. We are to administer, or “dispense,” God’s grace, say the two apostles. The image brings to mind one of the old-fashioned “atomizers” women used before the perfection of spray technology. Squeeze a rubber bulb, and droplets of perfume come shooting out of the fine holes at the other end. A few drops suffice for a whole body; a few pumps change the atmosphere in a room. That is how grace should work, I think. It does not convert the entire world or an entire society, but it does enrich the atmosphere.

Now I worry that the prevailing image of Christians has changed from that of a perfume atomizer to a different spray apparatus: the kind used by insect exterminators. *There’s a roach!* Pump, spray, pump, spray. *There’s a spot of evil!* Pump, spray, pump, spray. Some Christians I know have taken on the task of “moral exterminator” for the evil-infested society around them.

I share a deep concern for our society. I am struck, though, by the alternative power of mercy as demonstrated by Jesus, who came for the sick and not the well, for the sinners and not the righteous. Jesus never countenanced evil, but he did stand ready to forgive it. Somehow, he gained the reputation as a lover of sinners, a reputation that his followers are in danger of losing today. As Dorothy Day put it, “I really only love God as much as I love the person I love the least.”

\*The Old Testament contains many indications that God planned all along to expand his “family” beyond the Jewish race to encompass those from every tribe and nation. In a delicious irony, Peter received the vision of the unclean animals in Joppa, the very seaport from which Jonah tried to escape God’s command to carry God’s message to the pagan Ninevites.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



# THE GRACE BASICS

## The Direction of Grace

It can't. It can't come from the world. It must come from heaven. Man has no way, but *God has a way . . .*

Up until this point in Paul's letter all efforts at salvation have been from earth upward. Man has inflated his balloon with his own hot air and not been able to leave the atmosphere. Our pleas of ignorance are inexcusable (Rom. 1:20). Our comparisons with others are impermissible (2:1). Our religious merits are unacceptable (2:29). The conclusion is unavoidable: self-salvation simply does not work. Man has no way to save himself.

But Paul announces that *God has a way*. Where man fails God excels. Salvation comes from heaven downward, not earth upward. "A new day *from* heaven will dawn upon us" (Luke 1:78). "Every good action and every perfect gift is *from* God" (James 1:17).

Please note: Salvation is God-given, God-driven, God-empowered, and God-originated. The gift is not from man to God. It is from God to man. "It is not our love for God; it is God's love for us in sending his Son to be the way to take away our sins" (1 John 4:10).

On the basis of this point alone, Christianity is set apart from any other religion in the world. "No other system, ideology or religion proclaims a free forgiveness and a new life to those who have done nothing to deserve it but deserve judgment instead."

Every other approach to God is a bartering system; if I do this, God will do that. I'm either saved by works (what I do), emotions (what I experience), or knowledge (what I know).

By contrast, Christianity has no whiff of negotiation at all. Man is not the negotiator; indeed, man has no grounds from which to negotiate.

Those closest to God have understood this. Those nearest to him have never boasted about their deeds; in fact, they were most disgusted by the thought of self-salvation. They describe legalism in repulsive terms. Isaiah said our righteous acts are "like filthy pieces of cloth," referring to menstrual cloth (Isa. 64:6). Paul equated our religious credentials with the pile of stink you avoid in the cow pasture. ("[I] do count them but dung" [Phil. 3:8 κν]).

We can summarize the first three and one-half chapters of Romans with three words: *We have failed.*

## The Dilemma of Grace

God told Adam, "If you ever eat fruit from that tree, you will die" (Gen. 2:17). No fine print. No hidden agenda. No loophole or technicality. God has not played games with us. He has been fair. Since Eden, the wages of sin have been death (Rom. 6:23).

How can God punish the sin and love the sinner? Paul has made it clear, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness” (Rom. 1:18 NIV). Is God going to lower his standard so we can be forgiven? Is God going to look away and pretend I’ve never sinned? Would we want a God who altered the rules and made exceptions? No. We want a God who “does not change like...shifting shadows” (James 1:17) and who “judges all people in the same way” (Rom. 2:11).

Besides, to ignore my sin is to endorse my sin. If my sin has no price, then sin on! If my sin brings no pain, then sin on! In fact, “We should do evil so that good will come” (Rom. 3:8). Is this the aim of God? To compromise his holiness and enable our evil?

Of course not. Then what is he to do? How can he be just and love the sinner? How can he be loving and punish the sin? How can he satisfy his standard *and* forgive my mistakes? Is there any way God could honor the integrity of heaven without turning his back on me?

## The Decision of Grace

Holiness demands that sin be punished. Mercy compels that the sinner be loved. How can God do both?... For “God was in Christ, making peace between the world and himself...Christ had no sin, but God made him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God” (2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:19, 21).

The perfect record of Jesus was given to you, and your imperfect record was given to Christ. Jesus was “not guilty, but he suffered for those who are guilty to bring you to God” (1 Peter 3:18). As a result, God’s holiness is honored and his children are forgiven. By his perfect life Jesus fulfilled the commands of the law. By his death he satisfied the demands of sin. Jesus suffered not like a sinner, but as a sinner. Why else would he cry, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46 NKJV).

Ponder the achievement of God. He doesn’t condone our sin; nor does he compromise his standard. He doesn’t ignore our rebellion; nor does he relax his demands. Rather than dismiss our sin he assumes our sin and, incredibly, sentences himself. God’s holiness is honored. Our sin is punished. And we are redeemed. God is still God. The wages of sin is still death. And we are made perfect.

That’s right, *perfect*. “With one sacrifice he made perfect forever those who are being made holy” (Heb. 10:14). God justifies (makes perfect) then sanctifies (makes holy). God does what we cannot do so we can be what we dare not dream, perfect before God. He justly justifies the unjust.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). [\*In the grip of grace\*](#) (pp. 70–76). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

## Blessing #1: We Have Peace with God

“Since we have been made right with God by our faith, we have peace with God” (v. 1).

Peace with God. What a happy consequence of faith! Not just peace between countries, peace between neighbors, or peace at home; salvation brings peace with God.

Doesn't that describe what God has done for us? When we kept our sin silent, we withdrew from him. We saw him as an enemy. We took steps to avoid his presence. But our confession of faults alters our perception. God is no longer a foe but a friend. We are at peace with him. More than share in our sin, Jesus was “crushed for the evil we did. The punishment, which made us well, was given to him” (Isa. 53:5). “He accepted the shame” (Heb. 12:2). He leads us into the presence of God.

## Blessing #2: We Have a Place with God

Being ushered into God's presence is the second blessing Paul describes: “This happened through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has brought us into that blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy” (v. 2). Look at the phrase, “who has brought us into.” The Greek word means “to usher into the presence of royalty.” Twice in Ephesians Paul reminds us of our right to enter God's presence:

It is through Christ that all of us are able to come into the presence of the Father. (Eph. 2:18 TEV)

Now we can come fearlessly right into God's presence. . . . (Eph. 3:12 TLV)

Christ meets you outside the throne room, takes you by the hand, and walks you into the presence of God. Upon entrance we find grace, not condemnation; mercy, not punishment. Where we would never be granted an audience with the king, we are now welcomed into his presence.

Jesus promised, “All who stand before others and say they believe in me, I will say before my Father in heaven that they belong to me” (Matt. 10:32). Because we are friends of his Son, we have entrance to the throne room. He ushers us into that “blessing of God's grace that we now enjoy” (Rom. 5:2).

This gift is not an occasional visit before God but rather a permanent “access by faith into this grace by which we now stand” (v. 2 NIV). Our privilege lasts as long as God is faithful, and his faithfulness has never been questioned. “If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful, because he cannot be false to himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). Isaiah described God's faithfulness as the “belt around his waist” (Isa. 11:5). David announces that the Lord's faithfulness “reaches to the heavens” (Ps. 36:5).

Before moving on, note the sequence of these blessings. The first blessing deals with our past; we have peace with God because our past is pardoned. The second blessing deals with the present. We have a place with God because Jesus has presented us to his Father. Any guess what the next blessing will cover?

## Blessing #3: We Share in His Glory

You got it: our future. “And we are happy because of the hope we have of sharing God’s glory” (Rom. 5:2).

Because of God’s grace we go from being people whose “throats are like open graves” (Ps. 5:9) to being participants of God’s glory. We were washed up and put out; now we are called up and put in.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). [\*In the grip of grace\*](#) (pp. 91–94). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

## Grace Releases Us

In Romans 6 Paul asks a crucial question: “How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (v. 2 RSV). How can we who have been made right not live righteous lives? How can we who have been loved not love? How can we who have been blessed not bless? How can we who have been given grace not live graciously?

Paul seems stunned that an alternative would even exist! How could grace result in anything but gracious living? “So do you think we should continue sinning so that God will give us even more grace? No!” (v. 1).

The two-dollar term for this philosophy is antinomianism: *anti*, meaning “against” and *nomos* meaning “moral law.” Promoters of the idea see grace as a reason to do bad rather than a reason to do good. Grace grants them a ticket for evil. The worse I act the better God seems. This isn’t Paul’s first reference to the teaching. Remember Romans 3:7? “A person might say, ‘When I lie, it really gives him the glory, because my lie shows God’s truth.’”

What a scam. You mothers wouldn’t tolerate it. Can you imagine your teenager saying, “Mom, I’ll keep my room messy so the whole neighborhood can see what a good housekeeper you are”? A boss wouldn’t let the employee say, “The reason I’m lazy is to give you an opportunity to display your forgiveness.” No one respects the beggar who refuses to work, saying, “I’m just giving the government an opportunity to demonstrate benevolence.”

We’d scoff at such hypocrisy. We wouldn’t tolerate it, and we wouldn’t do it.

Or would we? Let’s answer that one slowly. Perhaps we don’t sin *so* God can give grace, but do we ever sin *knowing* God will give grace? Do we ever compromise tonight, knowing we’ll confess tomorrow?

Is that the intent of grace? Is God’s goal to promote disobedience? Hardly. “Grace...teaches us not to live against God nor to do the evil things the world wants us to do. Instead, that grace teaches us to live now in a wise and right way and in a way that shows we serve God” (Titus 2:11–12). God’s grace has released us from selfishness. Why return?

## The Penalty Has Been Paid

Think of it this way. Sin put you in prison. Sin locked you behind the bars of guilt and shame and deception and fear. Sin did nothing but shackle you to the wall of misery. Then Jesus came and paid your bail. He served your time; he satisfied the penalty and set you free. Christ died, and when you cast your lot with him, your old self died too.

The only way to be set free from the prison of sin is to serve its penalty. In this case the penalty is death. Someone has to die, either you or a heaven-sent substitute. You cannot leave prison unless there is a death. But that death has occurred at Calvary. And when Jesus died, you died to sin’s claim on your life. You are free. Christ has taken your place. There is no need for you to remain in the cell. Ever heard of a discharged prisoner who wanted to stay? Nor have I. When the doors open, prisoners leave. The thought of a person preferring jail over freedom doesn’t compute. Once the penalty is paid, why live under bondage? You are discharged from the penitentiary of sin. Why, in heaven’s name, would you ever want to set foot in that prison again?

Paul reminds us: “Our old life died with Christ on the cross so that our sinful selves would have no power over us and we would not be slaves to sin. Anyone who has died is made free from sin’s control” (Rom. 6:6–7).

He is not saying that it is impossible for believers to sin; he’s saying it is stupid for believers to sin. “It’s not the literal impossibility ... but the moral incongruity” of the saved returning to sin.

What does the prison have that you desire? Do you miss the guilt? Are you homesick for dishonesty? Do you have fond memories of being lied to and forgotten? Was life better when you were dejected and rejected? Do you have a longing to once again see a sinner in the mirror?

It makes no sense to go back to prison.

## The Vow Has Been Made

Not only has a price been paid, a vow has been made. “Did you forget that all of us became part of Christ when we were baptized?” (Rom. 6:2).

Baptism was no casual custom, no ho-hum ritual. Baptism was, and is, “a pledge made to God from a good conscience” (1 Pet. 3:21 TJB).

Paul’s high regard for baptism is demonstrated in the fact that he knows all of his readers have been instructed in its importance. “*You have been taught* that when we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:2 tjb, italics mine).

What form of amnesia is this? Like a bride horrified to see her new husband flirting with women at the wedding reception, Paul asks, “Did you forget your vows?”

Indeed, baptism is a vow, a sacred vow of the believer to follow Christ. Just as a wedding celebrates the fusion of two hearts, baptism celebrates the union of sinner with Savior. We “became part of Christ when we were baptized” (v. 2).

Do the bride and groom understand all of the implications of the wedding? No. Do they know every challenge or threat they will face? No. But they know they love each other and vow to be faithful to the end.

When a willing heart enters the waters of baptism, does he know the implications of the vow? No. Does she know every temptation or challenge? No. But both know the love of God and are responding to him.

Please understand, it is not the act that saves us. But it is the act that symbolizes how we are saved! The invisible work of the Holy Spirit is visibly dramatized in the water.

That plunge beneath the running waters was like a death; the moment’s pause while they swept overhead was like a burial; the standing erect once more in air and sunlight was a species of resurrection.

To return to sin after sealing our souls in baptism is like committing, well, it’s like committing adultery on your honeymoon. Can you imagine the distraught bride discovering her husband in the arms of another woman only days after hearing his vow at the altar? Among her many sizzling words will likely be the question, “Have you forgotten what you said to me?”

Similarly, God asks, “Does our union mean nothing to you? Is our covenant so fragile that you would choose the arms of a harlot over mine?”

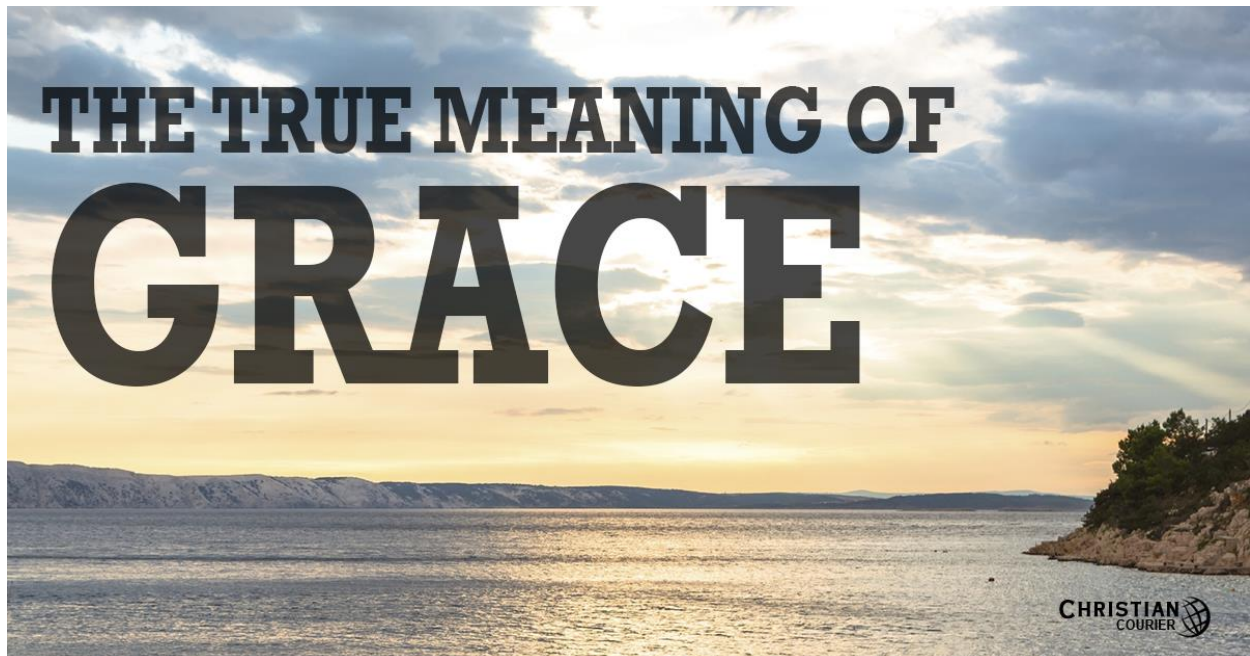
Who, in their right mind, would want to abandon these vows? Who will care for you more than Christ? Have we forgotten what life was like before our baptism? Have we forgotten the mess we were in before we were united with him?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). [\*In the grip of grace\*](#) (pp. 111–115). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

# The True Meaning of Grace

By **Wayne Jackson**



The concept of God’s “grace” is thrilling beyond words. It shines its brightest, however, against the seemingly dark backdrop of another aspect of our Creator’s nature — that of **sacred wrath**.

## The Wrath of God

The most common Greek word for “wrath” is **orge**. The term occurs 36 times in the New Testament (cf. Rom. 1:18; 2:5). Another expression denoting “wrath” is **thymos** (18 times; cf. Rev. 16:19; 19:15).

Most scholars make some distinction between the terms. Some suggest that **thymos** is “boiling” anger, whereas **orge** reflects an “abiding and settled” state of mind. Perhaps the two terms in concert denote the **intense and sustained** disposition of God towards evil and those who abandon themselves to it.



But wrath, as used of God, does not suggest an impulsive, emotional reaction, as the term frequently does with humans.

Rather, divine wrath is the reflection of a **deliberate and measured** reaction of a perfectly holy Being toward sin — a response that is entirely consistent with the righteous nature of a loving God.

Standing over against the starkness of sacred wrath, is the dazzling concept of grace.

## Grace Defined

“Grace” derives from the Greek, **charis**. In secular Greek, **charis** was related to **chairo**, “to rejoice.” As far back as Homer it denoted “sweetness” or “attractiveness.”

**Charis** came to signify “favor,” “goodwill,” and “lovingkindness” — especially as granted by a superior to an inferior.

In the New Testament, “grace” (156 times) takes on a special **redemptive sense** in which God makes available his **favor** on behalf of sinners, who actually do not deserve it.

There is tremendous emphasis in the New Testament upon the fact that human salvation is the result of Heaven’s grace. This beautiful truth should never be minimized. At the same time, it must not be perverted.

Unfortunately, much too often those with only a superficial concept of grace have hijacked the term and foisted upon it a sense alien to scriptural teaching.

Let us consider some of the precious Bible truths associated with the concept of salvation by grace.

## Grace Is for Everyone

God’s grace has been offered to the entire human family.

“For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Tit. 2:11).

This cannot mean that every soul will be saved. Such a conclusion would contradict numerous other passages.

What this does suggest is that Heaven’s grace is **potentially** available to all who care to access it by means of the divine plan of redemption (cf. Rom. 5:1; 6:3-4, 17).

This reality is in direct conflict with the Calvinistic notion that God, before the foundation of the world, chose only specific persons to be recipients of his grace.

## The Grace and Knowledge Connection

The access to God’s grace is by means of an objective body of revelation. Paul noted:

“For the grace of God hath appeared . . . instructing us” (Tit. 2:11-12).

Christianity is a **taught religion**. Isaiah, speaking of the messianic age, exclaimed: “he will teach us of his ways” (Is. 2:3). Jesus himself declared:

“It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and has learned, comes unto me” (Jn. 6:45).

God’s grace is not dispensed **apart** from an instruction that requires both understanding and obedience.

In these days when there is a tendency to stampede folks into the church, with minimal comprehension of what they are doing, this is a crucial matter to emphasize.

## Is Grace Conditional?

Yes, the reception of God’s grace is **conditional**.

Calvinism erroneously asserts that grace is bestowed unconditionally by the sovereign will of God. The Bible negates this concept.

The principle is illustrated by the example of Noah, who “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8); and yet, as the writer of Hebrews shows, the patriarch and his family were saved by preparing an ark in obedience to God’s instruction (Heb. 11:7; cf. Gen. 6:22).

Jehovah offered the grace. Noah, by faith, obeyed the Lord, and so was blessed. While God extends grace, human beings must be willing to receive the favor (2 Cor. 6:1).

## **Grace Is Not Earned**

Grace **excludes** merit.

We must constantly remind ourselves that humanity is not deserving of salvation. No one can “earn” pardon by works of human merit. If such were the case, we could boast regarding our redemption; however, that is impossible (Eph. 2:8-9).

Even if one were able to perform everything God commands, he still must regard himself as an “unprofitable servant” (Lk. 17:10). Jesus taught that our sins have put us head-over-heels in debt, and no person has the innate ability to liquidate that obligation (cf. Mt. 18:24-27).

When this concept is truly grasped, service to Almighty God will flow with a freshness and zeal that invigorates the soul. Doubtless a failure to fathom the true significance of grace is the reason many church members are spiritually lethargic.

## **How Can I Access God’s Grace?**

Grace is accessed initially at the point of **gospel obedience**.

It is shocking that so many sincere people are unaware of the fact that “grace” and “obedience” are not enemies. Paul affirmed that grace is accessed by faith (Rom. 5:1-2; Eph. 2:8-9).

It is not, however, a faith void of loving response to God. It is an active faith (James 2:21-26).

Consider this fact. In Ephesians 2:8, the apostle states that one is “saved by grace through faith.” Later, in the same document, he says that sinners are “cleansed by the washing of water with the word” (5:26).

“Saved” and “cleansed” represent the same idea. Further, scholars almost universally acknowledge that the “washing” is an allusion to baptism. It is clear, therefore, that the reception of grace, by means of the “faith” system, includes immersion in water.

Again, note that eternal life is the result of grace (cf. “grace of life,” 1 Pet. 3:7, i.e., life resulting from grace). But one experiences that “life” when he is raised from the water of immersion (Rom. 6:4). Heaven’s grace plan system includes obedience.

To express the matter another way, Christ “saves us, through the washing of regeneration [acknowledged to be a reference to baptism], and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.” Yet this is equivalent to being “justified by his grace” (Tit. 3:5, 7).

Obedience and grace do not stand in opposition to one another.

## Continuing in Grace

The state of grace must be embraced **continuously**; otherwise one will fall from divine favor, and his initial reception of Heaven’s grace will have been “in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1; cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).

It is incredible that many, who identify themselves with Christianity, should contend that it is impossible for the Christian to fall from God’s grace.

If one cannot fall out of grace, why did Paul urge his fellow-believers to “continue [present tense — sustained perseverance] in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43)?

The Scriptures warn of certain Christians who attempted to revert to the Mosaic regime for salvation. As a result, they were “severed from Christ” and “fallen away from grace” (Gal. 3:26-27; 5:4).

# What Is Grace?

*Ferrell Jenkins*

IT'S PROBABLY JUST A PREACHER'S STORY, but it conveys the right idea about grace. I heard the lamented Jack McElroy tell it when I was yet a teenager. An old Indian was asked to explain grace. He made a circle of dry straw around a bug and lit a fire. The bug moved first one way and then another, but there was no way he could escape. Then the wise old man took a stick and placed one end within the burning circle. The bug soon climbed on the stick and was lifted to safety. Said he, "That's grace."

Most illustrations have their weaknesses. God did not start the fire around man; man sinned in violation of the clear law of God and is responsible for his own lost condition. It is God who provides a way of escape when man is incapable of devising one for himself. The word "grace" means undeserved or unmerited favor. Grace is the opposite of merit. God's mercy, grace, love and kindness are closely associated in providing salvation for man (Ephesians 2:1–10).

The grace of God makes possible all kinds of blessings, both physical and spiritual. In Him we live, and move, and have our very being. In this sense God blesses all, sending rain, sunshine, and fruitful seasons upon the just and the unjust. It is the spiritual blessings, however, in which we are most interested now. Perhaps no passage of Scripture more clearly demonstrates what grace is than Ephesians 1:3–14.

In Ephesians chapter one the apostle Paul shows the ways in which God has shown His grace toward man. It must be observed that Paul is writing to saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus (verse 1). The things he says are true of those who are already Christians. God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (spiritual or heavenly realm) in Christ (verse 3). Notice some of the ways in which He has blessed us.

**1. He chose (or elected) us in Christ** before the foundation of the world (verse 4). This election took place in Christ who is God's elect (Luke 9:35; 1 Peter 2:4). We may choose whether to be in Christ. Without God's grace there would have been no choice.

**2. He foreordained (or predestined) us (verse 5).** This was not done on an individual basis, but in Christ. The saints have been foreordained unto adoption as sons of God through Christ.

**3. He provided redemption (forgiveness of sins) through the blood of Christ (verse 7).** Note that this was according to the riches of His grace which He *lavished* upon us.

**4. He made known to us the mystery of His will (verse 9).** God's secret plan for the salvation of man, which had been hidden for ages, is now revealed to the saints.

**5. He made us a heritage (verse 11).** Rather than the concept that we have obtained an inheritance, the footnote (and the American Standard translation) seems to be the correct idea. God has made us His own possession. This same thought is brought out in verse 14, "the redemption of God's own possession." What a tremendous thought! We belong to God. Out of all that He created, only the saints will live with Him throughout eternity.

**6. He sealed us with the Holy Spirit (verses 13–14).** As a result of our having heard the word of His grace, and having believed it, God has sealed us with the Holy Spirit. This means that He has marked us as His own. From our view-point the Holy Spirit is a pledge or earnest of the inheritance we will someday receive.

It is no wonder that Paul three times exclaims that all of this is according to the grace of God (verses 6, 7, 14). “Amazing grace! how sweet the sound.” Joseph Scriven said it for many of us in his beautiful song:

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise  
Than when we’ve first begun.

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<sup>16</sup> Jenkins, F. (1984). [What Is Grace?](#) (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 12.

# Parties of Law Versus Relationships of Grace

## OBEDIENCE TO THE RULES WON'T SAVE YOU

Please don't misunderstand. Jesus was not attacking the Pharisees for their obedience or holding it against them. He was attacking them because they were trusting in that obedience for their justification; because they were using it as a way to marginalize and judge others; because their outward compliance was more important to them than the heart of the Law: love for God and neighbor; and more damnably, because they thought they could buy God's favor with their behavior, that God owed them somehow.

Luke's narrative gives the intent of the story: "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous ..." (v. 9). The Pharisees had stopped trusting in God and had started trusting in themselves and their own abilities. They were human beings, in other words, and like any of us, no matter how much they obsessed over their daily record, they could never have earned their righteousness before God.

There is one final wrinkle. We learn that Jesus told this parable not simply because they were trusting in themselves, but because they "treated others with contempt." Their belief in their capacity to be good enough to impress God and other people fueled contempt for those who weren't obeying the way they were. The connection is not an arbitrary one. Because it engendered hatred for their neighbors and disdain for grace. Some might say this same diagnosis applies to Christians today.

What we see here—and just about everywhere throughout the Gospels—is that the immoral person gets the Gospel before the moral one does. The prostitute understands grace while the Pharisee doesn't. It is the actively unrighteous younger brother who grasps it before his self-righteous older brother. Our goodness is just as toxic as our badness, maybe even more so.

Back to the parable.

## A WELL-DESERVED BAD REPUTATION

The tax collector really was as bad as he thought he was - tax collectors were essentially debauched thugs and thieving traitors. At some point in this tax collector's life, his love of money had overcome his allegiance to his brothers and sisters, and he had betrayed them.

Jesus wasn't setting him up as someone to be emulated. Jesus exalted this man because he did not even dare to lift up his eyes, instead beating his breast and crying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Undoubtedly, when Jesus's audience heard this prayer, they scoffed and said, "Of course he's a sinner! That's the understatement of the century!" But because he knew that he had nothing to bring to the table, righteousness-wise, he went away justified. **With empty hands, he could receive the free gift of grace.**

Again, sinners love and value grace simply because they know they need it! The self-righteous good man who is impressed with himself is the one who chafes against God's free gift. This is no coincidence. Those who think they are "good" are, in fact, the ones most in need of grace—and the most opposed to it. Yet the whole point of this parable is to demonstrate that Christ has come to bless those who know they are bad and not those who think they are good.

To put it another way, Jesus did not come to offer moral reformation, he came to effect a **mortal resurrection**. Which is precisely what all of us need—both the “bad people” who know they're bad and the “good people” who think they're good. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God. The Law levels the playing field.

If you're simply looking for moral reformation (improved behavior), you might need a life coach, a cheerleading section, or a really good friend, but not a Savior. But if you require mortal resurrection, you're going to need something beyond yourself, someone who will raise dead people to life, give sight to the blind, and set captives free.

Jesus uses this parable to tell those of us who think we have it together, who never miss work or church, who love our kids and take our wives out on dates, who read our Bibles each morning, that we are still needy beggars who find acceptance with God in Christ's righteousness *alone*. *Alone!* We never outgrow our need for grace—ever.

## HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS AND ALIENATE PEOPLE

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:7–8)

We who were dead have been made alive.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4–6)

The painful struggle to which Paul is giving voice arises from his condition as someone who has been raised from the dead and is now alive to Christ (justified before God), but sin continues to plague him.

So even after we become Christians, our thoughts, words, motives, deeds, and affections need the constant cleansing of Christ's blood and the forgiveness that comes our way for free. We never outgrow our need for Christ's finished work on our behalf—we never graduate beyond our desperate need for Christ's righteousness and his strong and perfect blood-soaked plea “before the throne of God above.”

This is why the Gospel is just as much for Christians as it is for non-Christians. Our dire need for God's grace doesn't get smaller after God saves us. In one sense, it actually gets bigger. Christian growth, says the apostle Peter, is always growth into grace, not away from it.



Remember, the apostle Paul referred to himself as the least of all the saints and the chief of sinners at the *end* of his life. For Paul, spiritual growth had to do with the realization of how utterly dependent he was on the mercy and grace of God. He did not arrive at some point where he needed Jesus less.

## SINFUL SAINTS AND SAINTLY SINNERS

At this point someone might say, “Wait a minute. Is *sinner* an appropriate term to describe a Christian’s identity? After all, didn’t Paul refer to Christians as saints? Once God saves us, aren’t we new creatures? The old (sinner) is gone, and the new (saint) has come?” These are important questions.

The designation of *sinner* is misapplied only if it is used to describe the Christian’s core *identity*—their person. Before God, identity is *not* a both/and (sinner *and* saint); it is an either/or (sinner *or* saint). The basis of this difference is not [merited] anthropological. It is strictly and solely Christological: to be in Christ is to be righteous before God.

Paul does something unprecedented (in comparison with early Jewish literature) in that he designates all people outside of Christ with the identity *sinner* (Rom. 5:8, for example). But even more novel and scandalous is his corresponding claim that it is precisely sinners who are, in Christ, identified as freely justified (Rom. 3:23–24). Sinners and saints at the same time, in other words! So, *simul justus et peccator* is *not* a description of our Christian identity; it is *not* a description of who we are before God. It is, however, a description of the both/and that characterizes the Christian life *as lived* here and now, in the real world.

Pastorally, and in our relationships with other people, this truth allows us to affirm (without crossing our fingers) that in Christ—at the level of identity—the Christian is 100 percent righteous before God, while at the same time recognizing the persistence of sin. If we don’t speak in terms of two coexistence states then the undeniable reality of ongoing sin leads to the qualification of our identity in Christ: some sin must mean not totally righteous..

If you’re a Christian, here’s the good news: Who you *really* are has nothing to do with you—how much you can accomplish, who you can become, your strengths, your weaknesses, your sordid past, your family background, your education, and so on. Your identity is firmly anchored in Christ’s accomplishment, not yours; his strength, not yours; his performance, not yours; his victory, not yours. Your identity is steadfastly established in his substitution, not your sin.

The late Brennan Manning put this better than I ever could when he wrote, “To live by grace means to acknowledge my whole life story, the light side and the dark. In admitting my shadow side, I learn who I am and what God’s grace means.... My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Tchividjian, T. (2013). [\*One way love: inexhaustible grace for an exhausted world\*](#). Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

# AN OFFENSIVE GIFT

The legendary antagonist of Hugo's *Les Misérables* is the unrelenting and supremely competent inspector Javert. When we initially meet him, Javert is serving as a guard at the jail where Jean Valjean is imprisoned. When Valjean is given parole, it is Javert who insists that no matter where he goes or what he does, he will always be defined as a criminal. After the plot details recounted in chapter 4, Valjean breaks his parole and eventually assumes a false identity as mayor of a small town. A few years later, Javert, now promoted to the rank of inspector, recognizes his former prisoner and makes it his personal vendetta to bring him to justice. He does his job, but Valjean eludes him.

To say that Inspector Javert is committed to the rigorous inflexibility of the law would be an understatement. Javert does more than enforce the law—he embodies it. Indeed, mankind's relationship with the law was actually one of the main themes of the book, according to Victor Hugo himself. When they adapted the work for the stage, Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg made this very clear. "Mine is the way of the law," Javert sings early on.

Valjean refuses to play by the same rules of quid pro quo, going so far as to be gracious with Javert in their several encounters. Valjean's treatment of him haunts and radically disorients Javert. In the climatic scene, instead of doing away with him once and for all, Valjean saves Javert's life. Javert is utterly undone by this unexpected act of mercy. Hugo's description of his inner conflict captures the offense of grace at its most visceral:

Jean Valjean confused him. All the axioms that had served as the supports of his life crumbled away before this man. Jean Valjean's generosity toward him, Javert, overwhelmed him.... Javert felt that something horrible was penetrating his soul, admiration for a convict.... A beneficent malefactor, a compassionate convict, kind, helpful, clement, returning good for evil, returning pardon for hatred, loving pity rather than vengeance, preferring to destroy himself rather than destroy his enemy, saving the one who had struck him, kneeling on the heights of virtue, nearer angels than men. Javert was compelled to acknowledge that this monster existed.

This could not go on....

All that [Javert] believed in was dissipating. Truths he had no wish for besieged him inexorably.... Authority was dead in him. He had no further reason for being.

The Law is ironclad. It does not make exceptions. It cannot abide mercy. Like a robot being given a directive that contradicts its programming, the law-addicted person has a complete meltdown when shown grace. Which is precisely what happened to Javert.

In the same scene in the musical, he sings:

*I am the Law and the Law is not mocked ...  
Granting me my life today  
this man has killed me even so.*

For Javert, as with all of us, the logic of law makes sense. He has lived his entire life according to the if-then conditionality: if you do wrong, then you must be punished. This makes him, and us, feel safe. It's easy to comprehend. It promotes a sense of manageability. And best of all, it keeps him, and us, in control. **We get to keep our ledgers and scorecards.** Javert would rather die than deal with the disorienting reality of the one-way love he receives from Valjean—so he jumps into the river, ending his life. *He chooses death over grace, control over chaos.*

Like Javert, we are, by nature, allergic to grace. The logic of grace is deeply offensive to our law-locked hearts. In fact, it isn't really logic at all. **It is more of a counterintuition that turns everything upside down and inside out.** If the law says, "Good people get good stuff; bad people get bad stuff," then grace says, "The bad get the best; the worst inherit the wealth; the slave becomes a son."

Our initial response to one-way love tends to be one of shock and suspicion. We hear, "Of course you don't deserve it, but I'm giving it to you anyway." We wonder, *What is this really about? What's the catch?* Internal bells and alarms start to go off, and we begin saying, "Wait a minute.... This sounds too good to be true." Like Javert, we wonder about the ulterior motives of the excessively generous. What's in it for Him? After all, who could trust in or believe something so radically unbelievable?

But perhaps, like Javert, our defenses and suspicions are finally overwhelmed, and we are brought face-to-face with the extent of this free gift. When we do, we may find that disbelief is replaced by fear. Grace violates our deepest sense of justice and rightness, and like Javert, we are scared to death when grace wrests control completely out of our hands. In fact, life according to the law no longer makes sense in light of grace. Fearful of what kind of chaos would ensue if we abandoned ourselves wholly to its radicality, we cling to control—we stick with what we know so well, with what comes naturally. And just like Javert, **we choose death over freedom.**

Of course, the offensiveness of grace is not limited to literature. It is one of the main themes of the Bible. As we all know, Jesus encountered massive amounts of resistance to his ministry; indeed, his message is what got him killed. Grace was enormously threatening to the status quo then, just as it is today. As much as we might crave it when we are at the end of our rope, one-way love runs counter to the natural inclinations of the human heart - we see its offensiveness born out in the Bible, in the church, and in our everyday lives.

One of the Pharisees asked [Jesus] to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." (Luke 7:36–39)

## A RUINED DINNER PARTY

To grasp the depth of the offense we read of here, we need to understand a few things about social mores in the ancient Near East. From their earliest years, girls were instructed in proper etiquette. They were warned by their mothers about what happened to women who ignored the rules. Those women were the kind of women other women would shun. They weren't welcome in "nice" society, and self-respecting men disdained them. They had to hide during the day and do whatever work they did under the cover of night. And if they ever once decided that they might want to get right with God, there wasn't really any avenue open to them. Once a woman was marked as being immoral, beyond the pale, a sinner, she was and always would be an outcast.

## YOUR REPUTATION PRECEDES YOU

Notice the names and lack thereof. We are given the name of the Pharisee who had invited Jesus for dinner, Simon, but the name of the woman who barges in goes unrecorded. Perhaps because it does not need to be. She is known by reputation, "the" immoral woman, "the" sinner. When news of this encounter gets out, it is very likely that nobody wonders, even for a moment, who the "she" is.

Now, not only was this woman despised for her lifestyle, she was evidently unafraid of adding fuel to the fire. First, she entered Simon's home uninvited and unaccompanied. "Who does she think she is? How dare she?" everyone in attendance would have murmured in shocked dismay. This was the *last* person you would want coming to a dinner party. She wasn't crashing just any dinner party—it was a party at the home of a religious leader, a Pharisee, a holy man, the opposite of a place where she might conceivably be welcome. So here she came, this epitome of everything a woman should not be—rebellious, promiscuous, uncouth, foolish, and very likely diseased—and she threw herself down at the feet of Simon's guest. Why didn't she just wait for Jesus outside or try to catch him beforehand? Why wasn't she afraid of what would happen?

Her brazenness didn't end there. No, the indignities just kept multiplying. Out from under her soiled robes, she brought an alabaster flask of ointment. Onlookers could easily surmise where she had gotten the money to buy it and for what purposes she had previously used it. But now she fell behind a reclining Jesus, while Simon, the disciples, and even the house slaves stood aghast. She poured her precious perfume on Jesus's feet. Then she uncovered her head (another religious no-no), took down her hair, and used her hair as a towel to clean him. Apparently, she wept so intensely that her tears made a bath for his calloused, dry feet. And then she kissed him. Over and over again. *And he welcomed it. Jesus welcomed the kisses of a whore.* She, the defiled, was cleaning Jesus, the pure.

Again, you have to ask yourself, "What was she thinking, pulling such a bold move? How did she think those men would respond? How did she think Jesus would respond? What was her hope? And where did she get the courage to do such a thing?" Clearly, this woman had come to the end of herself. Like an addict hitting bottom, she had died to everything but her desire for help. She ran to Christ, and he did not turn her away. **Grace begins where pride ends.**

The scene offended those who witnessed it. And it did not offend them because they were overly prudish or hyperreligious—although they probably were. Grace offends because it *is* offensive. **Unlike every other kind of love there is, one-way love does not depend on our loveliness. It precedes loveliness.** And while we see it mirrored in countless ways in our daily lives and relationships, the Gospel is the only place where we find this kind of paradigm-shattering grace in its pure, unadulterated state. Jesus is its starting point, and yet we must never forget that it got him crucified.

## ANOTHER LOST SOUL

Although it was shocking to the people in attendance, I am guessing that Jesus's response to this woman doesn't offend us much. Perhaps we feel sorry for the woman. Truth be told, in our day and age, it is not really the story of the immoral woman that is so shocking. It is Christ's interaction with Simon the Pharisee that gives us pause. Indeed, there was more than one person at that dinner party in need of saving.

We don't know why Simon invited Jesus to dine with him. Perhaps as a high-ranking member of the religious elite, he thought it was his social obligation. Perhaps he had a secret hope that Jesus was the Messiah and that he would be the first to herald him. Maybe he was suspicious and looking for a way to discredit Jesus in the eyes of his fellow villagers. Or perhaps he wanted Jesus to see how righteous *he* was and to honor *him*. We don't know. We only know that Simon was not overly welcoming to Jesus when he arrived, refusing to offer him the customary gestures of cleansing water, a kiss, or anointing oil. But like every other encounter Jesus had with the uninitiated, we know that Simon's life was about to be completely inverted. What might have begun as a search for a flattering word, a burning curiosity, or an embellished reputation ended up demolishing everything Simon thought he knew about God.

Simon's assumption, of course, was that if Jesus knew this woman was immoral, he wouldn't let her near him. But there was another, more insidious assumption hidden in his presuppositions: *She's different from me. She is a sinner, and I am not.* It probably never crossed his mind that Jesus had to condescend to come into *Simon's* house just as much as he did to receive this woman's kisses. **Simon's problem was that he thought he didn't have a problem.** Not surprisingly, this is what we call *pharisaism*. The miracle is that Jesus had great love for this self-righteous zealot and was determined to rescue him:

And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:40–50)

Three sentences. One question. Complete annihilation. Neither debtor was able to repay their debt. So, the debt, if it was to be addressed at all, had to be cancelled via the generosity of the money-lender. It is as if the Lord said, "Simon, you're the primary debtor here. I have cancelled your great debt, but your love for me is paltry, because you don't think you owe me much. And when it comes to real righteousness, true obedience, you, a student of the Law, know that love from the heart is all that ultimately matters. What you do not understand is that right now, this immoral woman is more righteous than you are, because she loves and you don't. *You need to learn from her.*"

Learn from *her*? On this side of the story, it's nearly impossible for us to understand the shock and offense that Simon must have felt. Simon's discomfort at this point was obvious by his equivocating answer: "Well ... I suppose ... the one who had been forgiven for much loved much..." This man, who just one moment ago thought he had all the answers, was now hedging.

But once Jesus had begun, he wouldn't stop until Simon was completely undone. In lawyerlike fashion, Jesus proceeded, point by point, through all of Simon's breaches of hospitality. Simon hadn't been gracious with Jesus, because he had a falsely high view of himself. Perhaps he thought Jesus should have been grateful! Simon did not know himself. He thought he had no need of grace. He was enamored with his own "righteousness."

Then, in case Simon thought he should have just been a bit more courteous to his guest, Jesus forgave the immoral woman's sin. This act left Simon completely speechless. The Bible doesn't tell us anything more about Simon, but one thing we can safely assume is that he was never the same. The rescue project had begun. Perhaps he found rest for his troubled conscience in the grace of the Savior who welcomed the kisses of both harlots and Pharisees, or perhaps he spent his days in despair and self-recrimination. I pray it was the former.

## STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

As it did with Simon and Javert, one-way love upends our sense of fairness and offends our deepest instincts. We insist that reality operate according to the predictable economy of reward and punishment, especially when it comes to those who have done us harm. Grace is radically unbalanced. As Doug Wilson put it recently, "Grace is wild. Grace unsettles everything. Grace overflows the banks. Grace is not tame. In fact, unless we are making the devout nervous, we are not preaching grace as we ought."

The truth is, we all have a bit of the self-righteous older brother in the parable of the prodigal son inside us. Remember the elder brother? The one who worked for years and never outwardly disrespected his father but was incensed when his father welcomed his wayward younger brother back to the fold. The elder brother's reaction revealed that he had more in common with his sibling than he realized: neither of them loved the father. When the elder brother saw the father giving away part of the inheritance he thought he deserved, his true motivations became evident.

In the end, of course, the prodigal son was welcomed home while his older, self-righteous brother stood alone in the courtyard, fuming with bitterness. His offense at the grace his brother received stranded him out in the cold, away from the joyful celebration inside, **which is where the story leaves him.**

So, it often is with us. The storm may be raging all around us, our foundations may be shaking, but we would rather perish than give up our “rights.” We have worked too hard for that! Gerhard Forde puts it like this:

You see, we really are sealed up in the prison of our conditional thinking. It is terribly difficult for us to get out, and even if someone batters down the door and shatters the bars, chances are we will stay in the prison anyway!

There is no way around it: God’s one-way love is deeply offensive. Frightening even. So much so that if you’re not offended by it, you probably haven’t encountered the real thing. Grace turns our world upside down. It disrespects our values, pops the bubble of our self-righteousness, suspends reciprocity, and introduces chaos. It throws our to-do lists out the window.

## NOTES

1. Referring to himself in the third person in the preface to his book *The Toilers of the Sea*, dated March 1866, Victor Hugo wrote:  
“A triple *ananke* (necessity) weighs upon us: the *ananke* of dogmas, the *ananke* of laws, the *ananke* of things. In *Notre-Dame de Paris* the author has denounced the first; in *Les Misérables* he has pointed out the second; in this book he indicates the third. With these three fatalities which envelop man is mingled the interior fatality, that supreme *ananke*, the human heart.” Victor Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea* (New York: Heritage, 1961), 1.
2. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Lee Fahnestock and Norman MacAfee (New York: Penguin, 1987), 1322–1325.
3. Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg. “Javert’s Suicide,” *Les Misérables: Cast Recording* (Decca, 1990).
4. Douglas Wilson, “Bones and Silicon,” *Blog and Mablog*, November 13, 2010, accessed July 15, 2013, [dougwils.com/s12-liturgy-and-worship/bones-and-silicon.html](http://dougwils.com/s12-liturgy-and-worship/bones-and-silicon.html).
5. Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 24.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Tchividjian, T. (2013). [\*One way love: inexhaustible grace for an exhausted world\*](#). Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

**By its very nature legalism encourages hypocrisy because it defines a set of behavior that may cloak what is going on inside. I know of only two alternatives to hypocrisy: perfection or honesty. Since I have never met a person who loves the Lord our God with all her heart, mind, and soul, and loves her neighbor as herself, I do not view perfection as a realistic alternative. Our only option, then, is honesty that leads to repentance. As the Bible shows, God's grace can cover any sin, including murder, infidelity, or betrayal. Yet by definition grace must be received, and hypocrisy disguises our need to receive grace. When the masks fall, hypocrisy is exposed as an elaborate ruse to avoid grace.**

Everything they do is done for men to see ... they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'" Jesus' critique centered on what legalism does to the law-keeper: it fosters feelings of *pride* and *competition*. Instead of getting on with the task of creating a just society that would shine as a light to the Gentiles, the Pharisees narrowed their vision and began competing with each other. Caught up in trying to impress each other with spiritual calisthenics, they lost contact with the real enemy, as well as with the rest of the world. For all their strictness the Pharisees did not seem to resent the obligations of the law. They kept inventing new rules, after all. The Pharisees saw strictness as a means of achieving, of gaining status. Jesus condemned that pride, and also condemned the tiered spirituality that ranked some sins as acceptable (hatred, materialism, lust, divorce) and others as unacceptable (murder, adultery, breaking Sabbath rules).

We Christians have our own grouping of "acceptable" and "unacceptable" sins. As long as we avoid the most egregious sins, we feel pretty good about our spiritual status. The problem is, our understanding of egregious sins keeps changing. In the Middle Ages, charging interest was considered immoral, so much so that Jews were conscripted to do the dirty work. Nowadays Christians enjoy credit cards, home mortgage loans, and mutual fund accounts without a pang of guilt. The list of seven deadly sins included gluttony, envy, and spiritual sloth or "melancholy"—behavior that rarely attracts a sermon today. Jesus took an altogether different approach to sin. Rather than ranking sins as significant or less significant, he raised his listeners' sights to a perfect God, before whom all of us are sinners. We all fall back on the grace of God. Isaiah put it in earthy language: all our righteous acts, he said, are as "filthy rags," literally, "soiled undergarments." In an ironic way, blatant sinners have a kind of advantage when it comes to grace. The author Graham Greene used to say he had no excuse, no grounds on which to defend his (mis)behavior. Jesus' story of the Prodigal Son makes a similar point. The prodigal son had no leg to stand on, no possible basis for spiritual pride. By any measure of spiritual competition he had failed, and now he had nothing to lean against but grace. God's love and forgiveness extended equally to the virtuous elder brother, of course, but that son, too busy comparing himself to his irresponsible sibling, was blinded to the truth about himself.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [\*Where is god when it hurts/what's so amazing about grace?\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



It is possible, warns the biblical writer Jude, to “change the grace of our God into a license for immorality.” Not even an emphasis on repentance erases this danger completely. At first a devious idea forms in the back of the mind. *It’s something I want. Yeah, I know, it’s wrong. But why don’t I just go ahead anyway? I can always get forgiveness later.* The idea grows into an obsession, and ultimately grace becomes “a license for immorality.”

Christians have responded to this danger in various ways. Martin Luther, intoxicated with God’s grace, sometimes scoffed at the potential for abuse. “If you are a preacher of grace, do not preach a fictitious, but a true, grace; and if the grace is true, carry a true, and not a fictitious sin,” he wrote his friend Melancthon. “Be a sinner and sin vigorously.... It is sufficient that we recognize through the wealth of God’s glory, the lamb who bears the sin of the world; from this, sin does not sever us, even if thousands, thousands of times in one day we should fornicate or murder.”

Others, alarmed at the prospect of Christians fornicating or murdering thousands of times in one day, have called Luther to task for his hyperbole. The Bible, after all, presents grace as a healing counterforce to sin. How can the two coexist in the same person? Shouldn’t we “grow in grace,” as Peter commands? Shouldn’t our family likeness to God increase? “Christ accepts us as we are,” wrote Walter Trobisch, “but when he accepts us, we cannot remain as we are.”

Twentieth-century theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the phrase “cheap grace” as a way of summarizing **grace abuse**. Living in Nazi Germany, he was appalled by the cowardly way in which Christians were responding to Hitler’s threat. Lutheran pastors preached grace from the pulpit on Sundays, then kept quiet the rest of the week as the Nazis pursued their policies of racism, euthanasia, and finally genocide. Bonhoeffer’s book *The Cost of Discipleship* highlights the many New Testament passages commanding Christians to attain holiness. Every call to conversion, he insisted, includes a call to discipleship, to Christ-likeness.

In the book of Romans, Paul bores in on these very issues. No other biblical passage gives such a focused look at grace in all its mystery, and for perspective on the scandal of grace we must turn to Romans 6–7.

The first few chapters of Romans have tolled a bell on the miserable state of humanity, with the damning conclusion: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Like a fanfare introducing a new symphonic movement, the next two chapters tell of a grace that wipes out any penalty: “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Grand theology to be sure, but such a sweeping declaration introduces the very practical problem I have been circling around: Why be good if you know in advance you will be forgiven? Why strive to be Just As God Wants when he accepts me Just As I Am?

Paul knows he has opened a theological floodgate. Romans 6 asks bluntly, “What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” and again “What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Paul gives a short, explosive answer to both questions: “By no means!” Other translations are more colorful: the King James Version, for example, has it, “God forbid!”

What absorbs the apostle in these dense, passionate chapters is, quite simply, **the scandal of grace**. The question “Why be good?” lies at the heart of Paul’s argument. If you know in advance you’ll be forgiven, why not join the bacchanalian pagans? Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow God will forgive. Paul cannot ignore this apparent loophole.

Paul's first illustration (Romans 6:1–14) speaks directly to the point. He poses the question, If grace increases as sin increases, then why not sin as much as possible in order to give God more opportunity to extend grace? Although such reasoning may sound perverse, at various times Christians have followed exactly that loopy logic. A third-century bishop was shocked to see devout martyrs of the Christian faith devote their last nights in prison to drunkenness, revelry, and promiscuity. Since martyrs' death would make them perfect, they reasoned, what would it matter if they spent their last hours sinning? And in Cromwell's England, an extremist sect known as the Ranters developed a doctrine of the "holiness of sin." One leader cursed for an entire hour in the pulpit of a London church; others got drunk and blasphemed in public.

Paul has no time for such ethical convolutions. To refute them, he begins with a basic analogy that starkly contrasts death and life. "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" he asks, incredulous. No Christian resurrected to new life should be pining for the grave. Sin has the stench of death about it. Why would anyone choose it?

Paul's vivid imagery of death versus life does not fully settle the question at hand, however, for wickedness does not always have the stench of death about it—at least, not to fallen human beings. Grace abuse is a real temptation. Flip through the ads in any current magazine and you'll see temptations toward lust, greed, envy, and pride that make sin downright appealing. Like farm pigs, we enjoy a good wallow in the mud.

Moreover, although Christians may have "died to sin" in some theoretical way, it keeps popping back to life. Paul, a realist, recognized this fact, or else he would not have advised us in the same passage, "*Count yourselves dead to sin*" and "*Do not let sin reign in your mortal body.*"

Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson performed a rather bizarre experiment on ants that may supplement Paul's illustration. After noticing that it took ants a few days to recognize one of their crumpled nestmates as having died, he determined that ants identified death by clues of smell, not visually. As the ant's body began to decompose, other ants would infallibly carry it out of the nest to a refuse pile. After many tries, Wilson narrowed down the precise chemical clue to oleic acid. If the ants smelled oleic acid, they would carry out the corpse; any other smell, they ignored. Their instinct was so strong that if Wilson daubed oleic acid on bits of paper, other ants would dutifully carry the paper to the ant cemetery.

In a final twist, Wilson painted oleic acid on the bodies of living ants. Sure enough, their nestmates seized them and marched them, their legs and antennae wriggling in protest, out to the ant cemetery. Thus deposited, the indignant "living dead" cleaned themselves off before returning to the nest. If they did not remove every trace of the oleic acid, the nestmates would promptly seize them again and return them to the cemetery. They had to be certifiably alive, judged solely by smell, before being accepted back into the nest.

I think of that image, "dead" ants acting very much alive, when I read Paul's first illustration in Romans 6. Sin may be dead, but it stubbornly wriggles back to life.

Immediately, Paul restates the dilemma in a subtly different way: “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” (6:15). Does grace offer a license, a sort of free pass through the ethical maze of life?

“I suppose there’s some reason for keeping rules while you’re young ... so you’ll have enough energy left to break them all when you get old,” said Mark Twain, who valiantly tried to follow his own advice. Why not, if you know in advance you’ll be forgiven? Again, Paul lets out an incredulous “God forbid!” How do you answer someone whose main goal in life is to push the outer edges of the envelope of grace? Has such a person ever truly experienced grace?

Paul’s second analogy (6:15–23), human slavery, adds a new dimension to the discussion. “You used to be slaves to sin,” he begins, drawing a very apt comparison. Sin is a slave master that controls us whether we like it or not. Paradoxically, a headlong pursuit of freedom often turns into bondage: insist on the freedom to lose your temper whenever you feel anger, and you will soon find yourself a slave to rage.

For many, sin feels like a kind of slavery—or in modern terms, an addiction. Any member of a twelve-step group can describe the process. Set a firm resolution against yielding to your addiction, and for a time you bask in freedom. How many, though, experience the sad return to bondage.

Here is a precise description of the paradox from the novelist François Mauriac:

One by one the passions awake, prowl around and sniff at the object of their covetousness; they are attacking the poor undecided soul from the back and he is done for. How often has he got to be hurled into the ditch, to be stifled by the mud, to grasp at the edges and arise to the light again, to feel his hands give way and return again to the darkness, before he finally submits to the law of the spiritual life—the least understood law in the world and the one that repels him most though without it he cannot attain the grace of perseverance. What is required is the renunciation of the ego, and this is expressed perfectly in the phrase of Pascal: “Entire and sweet renunciation. Absolute submission to Jesus Christ and to my spiritual director.”

People may laugh and scoff at you for being unworthy of the title of free man and for having to submit yourself to a master.... But this enslavement is really a miraculous liberation, for even when you were free you spent the whole time forging chains for yourself and putting them on, riveting them tighter and tighter each moment. During the years when you thought you were free you submitted like an ox to the yoke of your countless hereditary ills. From the hour of your birth not one of your crimes has failed to go on living, has failed to imprison you more and more every day, has failed to beget other crimes. The Man you submit yourself to *does not want you to be free to be a slave*: he breaks the circle of your fetters, and, against your half-extinguished and still-smouldering desires, He kindles and re-kindles the fire of Grace.

In yet a third illustration (7:1–6), Paul likens the spiritual life to marriage. The basic analogy is not new, for the Bible often presents God as a lover pursuing a fickle bride. The intensity of feeling we have for the one person we choose to spend life with mirrors the passion God feels toward us, and God wants his passion returned in kind.

Far more than death, far more than slavery, the analogy of marriage provides an answer to the question Paul started with: Why be good? Really, that is the wrong question. It should be: Why love?

That reality helps me understand Paul’s gruff “God forbid!” response to the question “Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase?” Would a groom on his wedding night hold the following conversation with his bride? “Honey, I love you so much, and I’m eager to spend my life with you. But I need to work out a few details. Now that we’re married, how far can I go with other women? I know it might hurt you, but just think of all the opportunities you’ll have to forgive me after I betray you!” To such a Don Juan the only reasonable response is a slap in the face and a “God forbid!” Obviously, he does not understand the first thing about love.

Similarly, if we approach God with a “What can I get away with?” attitude, it proves we do not grasp what God has in mind for us. God wants something far beyond the relationship I might have with a slave master, who will enforce my obedience with a whip. God is not a boss or a business manager or a magic genie to serve at our command.

Indeed, God wants something more intimate than the closest relationship on earth, the lifetime bond between a man and a woman. What God wants is not a good performance, but my heart. God wants me to serve “in the new way of the Spirit”: not out of compulsion but out of desire. “Discipleship,” says Cliff Williams, “simply means the life which springs from grace.”

If I had to summarize the primary New Testament motivation for “being good” in one word, I would choose *gratitude*. Paul begins most of his letters with a summary of the riches we possess in Christ. If we comprehend what Christ has done for us, then surely out of gratitude we will strive to live “worthy” of such great love. We will strive for holiness not to make God love us but because he already does. As Paul told Titus, it is the grace of God that “teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives.” The best reason to be good is to want to be good. **Internal change requires relationship.** A person who truly loves God will be inclined to please God, which is why Jesus and Paul both summed up the entire law in the simple command, “Love God.” If we truly grasped the wonder of God’s love for us, the devious question that prompted Romans 6 and 7—What can I get away with? — would never even occur to us. We would spend our days trying to fathom, not exploit, God’s grace.

Author Keith Miller likens this [Dry Drunk] to a hypocrite in church, who changes the outside but not the inside. Real change, for the alcoholic as well as for the Christian, must begin with admitting the need for grace. **Denial blocks grace.**<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [\*Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## “Law and Grace”

By Lindy McDaniel

Trying to harmonize the concepts of “law” and “grace” has been a difficult task for Bible students for hundreds of years. The difficulty primarily centers on the writings of Paul, and especially as students grapple with the problem of harmonizing Paul’s writings with those of James. Paul wrote: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Rom. 3:28). However, James said: “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Some have concluded that salvation by God’s grace excludes obedience. Others maintain that one must obey God in order to be saved.

It is a dangerous practice to attempt to interpret some of the difficult writings of Paul apart from other scripture that hear on the same subjects. Peter warns: “Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote, to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness” (2 Pet. 3:14-17). Paul’s writings have been perverted, resulting in great harm.

## Salvation By Grace

Paul taught that salvation is by grace and not by works of law. He wrote: “Now to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteous” (Rom. 4:4-5). Again, “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under’ law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be! ” (Rom. 6:14-15). “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom. 11:6). “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

## Salvation By Works

Salvation is also attributed to works in the following passages: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (John 3:36). “And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). Paul even emphasizes obedience in his great epistle on salvation by grace through faith written to the Romans: “. . . through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles, for His name’s sake” (Rom. 1:5). “For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good, and innocent in what is evil.... but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:19,26).

Evidently, Paul had no trouble reconciling “faith” and “obedience.” Also study carefully James 2:14-26, 2 Cor. 10:5; Gal. 5:7; Gal. 6:4; Phil. 2:12-13; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; 2 Thess. 3:14-15, etc.

## Not Under Law

Paul wrote that the Christians in Rome were not under law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Does this mean that Christians are not under any law whatsoever, or that obedience has nothing to do with justification?

Paul wrote much about “the law” or “law” and it is important to understand that he almost always had in mind the “law of Moses.” John wrote: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1: 17). Those addressed by Paul were familiar with the “law of Moses,” but they did not have access to all of the New Testament writings, which contain “the faith” revealed through Christ. The great controversy of apostolic days was whether or not the “law of Moses” was to be bound upon the Gentiles in order for them to be saved (see Acts 15:1, 6-11; Gal. 2:16-21; 3:1-3; 5:14). It is quite obvious that Christians are not under the Law of Moses; but this does not mean that Christians are without Law.

Furthermore, we are not under any law system that demands perfect obedience in order to be saved. The Mosaical Code was that kind of law system. Paul wrote: “For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘cursed is every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.’ Now that no one is justified by the law before God is evident; for, the righteous man shall live by faith.’ However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, ‘he who practices them shall live by them!’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-for it is written, I cursed is every one who hangs on a tree’ ” (Gal. 3: 10-13).

Law condemns every man who has sinned, and all men are convicted as lawbreakers; but Jesus Christ has delivered us from the curse of the law. Even though Christians are not under the Mosaical Code, or any law system that demands human perfection, we are under law to Jesus Christ. Paul wrote: “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, that I might win those who are under the Law” (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Paul, even though he was a Jew, did not consider himself to be under the law of Moses, but he was under law to Christ. Paul brought himself under the law, not as being necessary to salvation, but as a custom. However, he was bound by the law of Christ, which is also called “the law of liberty” (James 1:25).

The scriptures teach that all men are under the rule of Jesus Christ. Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). Paul wrote of Jesus Christ: “And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Col. 1: 15-17). “. . . who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to him” (1 Pet. 3:22). The whole world is under the authority of Jesus Christ.

If grace has released us from the obligation of law, as some contend, then it would be impossible for a Christian to sin, for “where there is no law, neither is there violation” (Rom. 4:15). “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4); but there can be no lawlessness unless there is a law.



But all men have been pronounced guilty before God (Rom. 3:23), and besides all of this, even Christians do sin: “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Christians are not free from law. But they are free from the curse of the law through Jesus Christ. If and when they sin, they may gain forgiveness through the blood and advocacy of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:7-10; 2:1-2).

## **Law And Justification**

Some argue, “Yes, the Christian is under law, but he is not under law as a basis of justification.” In answer to this, let us first realize that the principal foundation of justification before God is “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” God’s grace, and our justification, centers on Jesus Christ, the son of God (see 2 Cor. 5:19; 6: 1; 8:9; Heb. 10: 5-7; 10:10, 14, etc.). This fundamental fact being understood, the important question is simply this: “Must a person obey God in order to be justified by the blood of -Jesus?” To this question, I emphatically say, “Yes!” That obedience to Christ is essential to salvation is abundantly clear in scripture. Peter writes: “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). See also Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; Rom. 6:17-18; etc.)

If a person is not under law as a condition of salvation, then his violation of law would not affect his salvation; yet the scriptures teach that the “lawless” and “ungodly” cannot inherit eternal life. “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2:11-13). “Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying” (Rev. 22:15).

A Christian may be “overtaken in a trespass” and need to be restored (Gal. 6: 1), or he may so sin as to lose his inheritance in Jesus Christ (Gal. 5:4; Heb. 6:4-8; Heb. 10:26-31; 2 Pet. 2:19-22). Thus, obedience has a direct bearing on our relationship with Jesus Christ. No, the Christian is not “free” from law.

Again, God will judge us according to our deeds done in the body. “And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds” (Rev. 20:12). Read also Rom. 2:5-16; 2 Thess. 1:6-8; and I Peter 4:17.

## **Faith And Obedience**

Again, it is argued, “The Bible teaches that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law” (see Rom. 3:28; Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9; Tit. 3:5-7, etc.). The “works” under consideration by Paul in these passages are those works which are meritorious in nature. By doing such works, a man may be said to have earned salvation. Since all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and continue to commit acts of sin (John 1:8), earning justification is rendered impossible. Justification is a gift and cannot be earned by human effort (Rom. 11:6). From these facts, some have foolishly concluded that it is not necessary to obey God in order to receive justification; but nothing could be further from the truth.

## **“Faith And Obedience”**

The gifts of God, although never earned by human effort, are frequently conditioned upon human effort. God healed Naaman, the Syrian Commander, of leprosy; but before this was accomplished, Naaman had to dip seven times in the river Jordan (see 2 Kings 5:10-14).

God gave Jericho into the hands of the Israelites, but it was required that they march around the walls a total of 13 times as prescribed by God (see Josh. 6). God gives us food and raiment; but these “good gifts” are not obtained apart from human effort. Apart from God’s grace, Naaman could not have been healed of leprosy; the Israelites could not have captured Jericho, and we could not be fed and clothed. These are simple but powerful illustrations of the grace of God. Do not be deceived into thinking that, “free gifts” cannot be conditioned upon human effort.

Salvation can be compared to a drowning man who is rescued. His small boat capsizes and sinks, and he is left helpless in the water unable to swim. A rescue boat approaches and a rope is thrown out to him. He grabs the rope and is pulled out of the water into the boat. He has been saved by the rescue men. Yet it was necessary for him to grab hold of the rope. Are you willing to “grab hold of the rope,” or do you foolishly think that God is going to do it all for you?

Our justification is conditioned upon faith. Human works of merit are centered on man, whereas faith is centered on God. Faith is the ground of our complete confidence in the unseen realm based upon the testimony of God (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:1-2; Rom. 10:17). Faith is expressed in obedience to God (Heb. 11: 4, 7, 8, 17, 24, 27; James 2:14-28). Thus, the Christian “walks by faith” (2 Cor. 5:7).

Again, it is protested, “Justification is based upon faith alone, and not obedience!” “Of course,” they reason, “faith always produces good works.” This is like trying to separate cause and effect or the tree from its fruits. Such distinctions have resulted in much confusion. Faith is perfected through works (James 2:22). The tree is always known by its fruits (Matt. 7:26). How can a man know that he has faith unless he is willing to do what Christ commands? Faith apart from works is dead (James 2:26).

Those who emphasize the necessity of “faith” while denying the necessity of “obedience” are making a serious mistake. Faith apart from works has no more power to save than works apart from faith. Inward perfection is no more possible than outward perfection. The concepts of salvation by “faith only” and salvation by “works only” are both “legalistic” in that attention is centered upon man himself. But genuine faith is centered upon God. This kind of faith does not question God’s grace, purposes, or plan of human redemption. It is a trusting and obedient faith. It never argues around God’s law; it seeks only to obey it. What kind of faith do you have?

Some preachers among us are beginning to accept “denominational” concepts of “grace” and “love.” They are teaching that justification is conditioned upon faith apart from obedience to the laws of Jesus Christ. They admit that baptism is included in the “principle of faith” as a condition of salvation; but they deny that “observing all things whatsoever the Lord has commanded” is embraced by the principle. It is said that obedience to Christ inevitably flows from faith, but it is faith itself that saves. With the exception of baptism being included in the principle of faith, this is what many “denominations” have been teaching for hundreds of years. Are we ready for this?

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# Are We Under Law or Grace?

By Wayne Jackson

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**Why do some insist that Christians are under law today? We are not under law, but grace. The law came by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus (Jn. 1:17).**

We must respectfully point out that the question recorded above reflects a serious misunderstanding of the nature of both law and grace. And it misrepresents the nature of the religious system to which men are amenable today.

It is a tragedy of enormous magnitude that some, waving the banner of grace, argue that they are free from the constraints of sacred law and thus are at liberty to forge their own route along the religious terrain.

One cannot but be reminded of Jude's indictment of certain persons who pervert God's grace to accommodate their own sensual goals (Jude 4).

## John 1:17 — Law and Grace

The beloved apostle records these words in John 1:17:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

Here, the terms "law" and "grace" are employed to designate the **predominate systems** of divine, written revelation—namely the two covenants.

The first covenant was that given through Moses at Sinai, commonly known as the law of Moses. The second was a universal covenant for mankind that issued from Jesus Christ, and was ratified by the Lord's death (Mt. 26:28).

Jeremiah referred to these respective systems as “the covenant” that Jehovah made with the fathers when he brought them out of Egyptian bondage, and the “new covenant” which later would be world-wide in scope (Jer. 31:31-34). The writer of the book of Hebrews referred to these laws as the first and the second (Heb. 8:7), or the old and the new (Heb. 8:13).

In the text under review (Jn. 1:17), the two covenants are designated respectively as “law” and “grace.” And there is a very logical explanation for these appellations. It has to do with the **prevailing themes** characteristic of these systems.

The function of the Mosaic law was as follows:

1. To demonstrate that the violation of divine law separates the perpetrator from God (Isa. 59:1-2).
2. To declare that written law is needed to define sin (Rom. 7:7).
3. To show, by recorded precedent, that sacred justice requires that a penalty be paid for law-breaking (Rom. 3:26; 1 Cor. 10:5ff).

On the other hand, the dominant design of the New Covenant is to stress the **redemptive mission** of Christ as the only remedy for the human sin problem (Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 15:3). The wonderful plan of salvation is the result of Heaven’s grace (Eph. 2:8-9), not human merit. No richer term, than that of grace, could be employed as a synecdoche (the part put for the whole) for the summation of God’s thrilling scheme of redemption.

It is entirely reasonable, therefore, that these two systems should be set forth in a contrasted fashion, such as law and grace.

## **Abusing the Text**

It is a baffling mystery as to how anyone, with even a cursory knowledge of Scripture, should not understand that there was an abundant measure of grace under the law of Moses.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord long before the Mosaic system was birthed (Gen. 6:8), but it was not the modern sort of cheap grace that disavows obedience (Gen. 6:22; cf. Heb. 11:7).

Scores of Old Testament passages stress the pouring out of Jehovah's grace in ancient times upon those who responded in obedience to his will (cf. Ex. 33:13; Dt. 7:12; Jer. 31:3).

It is no surprise that many today are ready to repudiate the idea that man is responsible to sacred law. Outlaws despise law!

The reality is, this irresponsible suggestion — that folks today are “under grace” as **opposed** to law — is so trifling that it would scarcely be worthy of a rebuttal were it not for the fact that it is so common.

The notion has absolutely no sanction in Scripture.

### **No Law Today?**

Were it the case that man is not under law in this era of time, then it would follow necessarily that **sin would not exist today**, for sin is a transgression of the law (1 Jn. 3:4). As Paul once noted, where there is no law, there is no sin (Rom. 4:15).

By way of contrast, since it obviously is the case that men (even Christians) do sin in this era (1 Jn. 1:8—2:2), the compelling implication is that there is a divine law to which men now are amenable.

### **The Christian-era Law of God in Prophecy**

The Old Testament prophets, in previewing the coming of the Christian age (“grace”), spoke of a time in which the **law of God** would be **obligatory**.

Isaiah, for instance, spoke of the days of the new covenant, when Jehovah's “law” would go forth from Zion (Is. 2:2-4). The term “law” renders an original term suggesting “instruction” considered as a “rule of duty” (Young 1965, 106).

Similarly, when Jeremiah spoke of the “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31ff), he made it the equivalent of God's law, which would take up residence in man's heart (Jer. 31:33).

## A King Is on His Throne

When Jesus Christ is repeatedly depicted as a king in the biblical record, clearly the concept is set forth that he exercises an **authority** to which men are expected to comply.

If this is not law, there is no meaning to such terms as king, rule, reign, submit, obey, etc. (see Mt. 2:2; 28:18; Lk. 19:14, 27; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:9-10; Heb. 5:9; Rev. 1:5; 19:16).

## Law Respected By Apostles

The inspired writers of the New Testament viewed the authority of the regime of Christ as one of law.

Our freedom from the condemning effect of sin is the result of our submission to the “law of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:2). The expression “law of the Spirit” is the same as the gospel, the new covenant system.

It is “of the Spirit” because it was conveyed by the Spirit’s direction. It is designated as law because it is an “expression of the divine will” and a “rule of conduct” (Lard n.d., 247).

Elsewhere, Paul acknowledged that he was “under law to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21). Additionally, to the Galatians he gives this admonition:

Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the **law of Christ** (Gal. 6:2).

Finally, if the inspired James is not referring to the present order of things, when he alluded to the “perfect law” (Jas. 1:25), of what was he speaking?

## Conclusion

A consideration of the foregoing facts ought to enable the conscientious Bible student to see John 1:17 in a balanced light.

Furthermore, it should forever banish the absurd notion that our modern world is exempt from the restraints of sacred law.



# *Saved by Grace Versus Earned by Works*

## **IF GOD REQUIRES ANYTHING OF US AS BELIEVERS, HOW IS THAT GRACE?**

### **GOOD WORKS ARE THE FRUIT OF OUR FAITH**

What is the place of good works in the New Testament under grace? According to the universal testimony of all New Testament writers, our good works are the proof and fruit of our faith.

Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles that they “should repent and turn to God and do works proving their repentance” (Acts 26:20). And in one of his greatest expositions of grace in the Bible (Eph. 2:1–10) he wrote, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we should walk in them” (vv. 8–10). Grace and works go hand in hand, with our good works being the natural expression of God’s gracious work in our lives.

In keeping with this teaching, Paul wrote to Titus:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, righteously, and in godliness in this present world, as we await the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for Himself a special people, zealous of good works.

—TITUS 2:11–14

There you have it again: grace results in good works, which is why Paul urged Titus to remind his hearers “to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1, ESV). A person can teach grace and call on God’s people to live godly lives and do good works. It is not either-or; it is both-and.

Jacob (James) confirmed this as well, writing:

What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well” —but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”

—JAMES 2:14–18, NLT

Now, returning to the first question, how is this different from the Sinai covenant? There are actually many pronounced differences between life under the Sinai covenant and life under the new covenant:

- Under the Sinai covenant there were perpetual sacrifices for our sins; under the new covenant there was one, once-for-all sacrifice made.
- Under the Sinai covenant righteousness came by the deeds of the Law; under the new covenant righteousness comes by faith in the Messiah.
- Under the Sinai covenant God spoke with terrifying fire in the midst of a dark cloud; under the new covenant He speaks to us face-to-face through His Son.
- Under the Sinai covenant only the high priest could enter the holiest place (the holy of holies in the tabernacle or temple); under the new covenant every believer has direct access to the holy of holies in heaven.
- Under the Sinai covenant there were blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience; under the new covenant we begin with every spiritual blessing in Christ stored up for us in heaven.

But this is what is so fascinating. According to Hebrews, because we have been given so much under the new and better covenant—that’s a major theme of the book—much more is required from us. Can I share with you what the author of Hebrews wrote? It is clear that he had quite a grasp on the meaning of grace as well:

Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution [he is speaking here of the Sinai covenant], how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation [he is speaking here about salvation by grace]? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

—HEBREWS 2:1–4, ESV

Exhortations like this are found throughout Hebrews, including these strong words from Hebrews 10. Will you read them prayerfully, asking God to make these verses real to you? Anyone who despised Moses’ law died without mercy in the presence of two or three witnesses. How much more severe a punishment do you suppose he deserves, who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded the blood of the covenant that sanctified him to be a common thing, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine,” says the Lord, “I will repay.” And again He says, “The Lord will judge His people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

—HEBREWS 10:28–31

Because so much has been given to us at such a high cost—the blood of God’s own Son, not the blood of an animal sacrifice—much is required of us. Please don’t call this “legalism” or “dead religion.” To do so is to insult the Spirit of grace and to make light of the price God paid to save you and me.

Hebrews addresses this once more in a remarkable passage that contrasts life under the Sinai covenant with life under the new covenant. You will be surprised by the application, which I will highlight in the text when we reach it.

First, the author of Hebrews describes what Israel experienced at Mount Sinai. It was terrifying indeed:

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and storm, and to the sound of a trumpet and to a voice speaking words, such that those who heard them begged that the word not be spoken to them anymore. For they could not endure that which was commanded: “If so much as a beast touches the mountain, it must be stoned or thrust through with a spear.” So terrible was the sight that Moses said, “I am terrified and trembling.”

—HEBREWS 12:18–21

Next, he contrasts that experience with our experience as believers under grace: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven; to God, the Judge of all; and to the spirits of the righteous ones made perfect; and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant; and to the sprinkled blood that speaks better than that of Abel.

—HEBREWS 12:22–24

What an incredible difference!

Then he draws the conclusion, giving this exhortation: “See that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused Him who spoke on earth, much less shall we escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Heb. 12:25).

Now, you might not like this, and it may not make you feel comfortable, but the goal of these words is not to comfort us; it is to make us sober. Don’t play games with grace! (As for comfort, there are thousands of other verses that bring comfort and assurance, and we drink them in too.)

So enjoy the amazing, incredible, almost indescribable depths of God’s grace expressed through Jesus, and by that same grace walk worthy of your high calling in the Lord. Since we are God’s own workmanship (Eph. 2:10; the New Living Translation actually says we are His “masterpiece”), let’s live this out to the full. As Paul also wrote, “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:8–10, ESV).

That really says it all. Let’s walk as children of light!<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, M. L. (2016). [The grace controversy: answers to 12 common questions](#). Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.

## Grace—The Basis of Justification

Grover Stevens

**IN EPHESIANS 2:8–9 THE INSPIRED WORD of God tells us: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”**

That salvation from sin is by God’s grace is positively affirmed and clearly stated by the inspired apostle (Ephesians 2:1–3), and then to make sure that there be no misunderstanding he adds negatively that salvation is “not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” The word “grace” means not deserved or unmerited. The word “gift” indicates something received without compensation, unearned. It is abundantly clear that God’s grace alone is the founding stone on which man’s salvation from sin rests.

### By God’s Grace—Through Man’s Faith

However, this passage also informs us that this grace saves us “*through faith*.” The apostle Paul says in Titus 2:11–12, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all* men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” If our salvation is solely by grace on God’s part and there is nothing that man can do to receive that gift of God’s grace, then *all men will be saved* and we would have universal salvation. But the apostle Paul tells us that we become the recipients of God’s saving grace “*through faith*.” The eminent Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, says in commenting on this passage: “*Through faith*: This phrase he adds in repeating what he said in verse 5 to make it plainer. ‘Grace’ is God’s part, ‘faith’ ours. *And that (kai touto)*: Neuter, not feminine *taute*, and so refers not to *pistis* [faith] (feminine) or to *charis* [gift] (feminine also), but to the act of being saved by grace *conditioned on faith on our part*.”

### “Not of Works”

When Paul says “not of works” he does not mean that there is nothing that man can or must do, as some loudly insist. There are four classes of works revealed in the New Testament: **(1) The works of the Law of Moses**, by which man cannot be justified as it demanded perfect obedience (Galatians 2:16–21; Acts 13:39). **(2) The works of man’s own righteousness**, works commanded by men (Colossians 2:21–23; Titus 3:5; Romans 10:1–3; 1 John 3:12; Acts 7:41). Obviously, these are works of man’s own devising. Such teaching as “join the church of your choice” or “worship in the way of your choice” or “believe in the faith of your choice” or “live good (keep the ten commandments) and you will go to heaven” are all included in this class. **(3) The works of Satan, darkness, and the flesh** (1 John 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Romans 13:12; John 7:7; Galatians 5:19ff). Certainly we are not saved by any of these kinds of works.

### Working God's Righteousness

The fourth kind of works are the **works of God, faith, and righteousness**. In John 6:29 the Lord Jesus said, "This is the *work of God*, that *ye believe* on him whom he hath sent." Clearly, *faith* is a work, and is a work that we must work in order to receive God's gift of grace, salvation. Galatians 5:6 says the faith that avails is the "faith which worketh by love." And James 2:26 tells us that "faith without works is dead." In Acts 10:34–35, the inspired apostle Peter says, "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and *worketh righteousness*, is accepted with him." 1 Thessalonians 1:3 speaks of "your *work of faith*." Philippians 3:9 says, "And be found in him, *not* having my *own* righteousness, which is of the law, but that ... *righteousness which is of God by faith*." Romans 10:1–3 teaches that salvation is not by the establishment of our *own* righteousness, but by *submission unto the righteousness of God*. Romans 5:1–2 teaches that it is "by faith" that we "have access into this grace wherein we stand" (are saved); and verse 21 says that "grace reigns through righteousness."

### No Cause To Boast

God's grace provided Christ and the gospel. In the gospel God has revealed His righteousness or commandments (Psalm 119:172) These commandments are faith, repentance, confession, baptism and godly living. When man has submitted to (obeyed) all of these, he still has done nothing of merit nor of which he could boast. He has done no works of his own righteousness, but has simply submitted to the righteousness of God—God's conditions of acceptance (Acts 10:35). His salvation is merely by the grace and mercy of God (Titus 3:5).

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<sup>22</sup> Stevens, G. (1984). [Grace—The Basis of Justification](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 20.

## Grace And Works

By [Mike Riley](#)

Some in the church have a denominational view of [Ephesians 2:8-9](#). This writer does not question their sincerity, but their understanding and knowledge. A clear statement of their position is, “We do not contribute one whit to our salvation” (Rubel Shelly, quoted in Yokefellow, vol. 18, no. 4, p. 3). They take the phrase, “not of works” ([Ephesians 2:9](#)) as the main emphasis that destroys any other understanding of the passage. Salvation comes, they teach, by grace only. If “we do not contribute one whit to our salvation”, then there is nothing for man to do. He is entirely passive in the salvation process, and God is sole actor. If anyone is saved, it is the independent act of God. If anyone is lost, it is God’s fault & He alone is to blame.

### Grace Referred To In Past Tense

In the scriptures, grace is referred to in past tense. [Titus 2:11](#) says, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men.” Grace “happened” for all men. The grace referred to by Paul in this passage is not something that comes to each saved man as the future unfolds, but it is some **past favor**. The apostle points back to the cross when the Lamb of God died for the sins of the world. If there is nothing for man to do, then salvation is universal, because Jesus died for all ([John 3:16-17](#); [Romans 5:6-21](#)).

## God Created A Plan Or Process Of Salvation

Notice again in [Ephesians 2:8](#), “For by grace are ye saved....” This blends with the revealed expression of divine sovereignty. God creates a plan. He created a process of salvation. Grace reveals the plan to all men to either receive or reject through faith ([Romans 10:17](#); [Acts 28:23-24](#)). The phrase, “obedience of faith” ([Rom. 16:26](#)) assumes a sovereign God. He established a plan and determined that those submitting to the plan receive salvation. It is certain that if God has a plan, He follows that plan.

## God’s Plan Affirms Man’s Free Will

God’s plan of salvation affirms the free will of man. God does not ban free will. He grants it! The plan of salvation demonstrates that those who follow the plan “shall be saved” ([Mark 16:16](#)). Man cannot compel God to save him. Salvation is “not of works lest any man should boast” ([Ephesians 2:9](#)). The plan comes from God’s will and not by man’s works which he devises. Paul did not want men to think they had done some “great thing” by which they forced God to save them. Salvation is by grace (the plan made known – [Titus 2:11-12](#)). It is also by submission to God. Elsewhere Paul calls it “obedience of faith” ([Rom. 16:26](#)). The saved man does not boast ([Ephesians 2:9](#)) but submits to God’s plan of salvation by grace through faith ([Romans 10:16-17](#)).

## Conclusion

Those who abuse [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), making the phrase “not of works” mean any works – any activity, takes the passage out of its biblical context and promotes what Paul condemns. They accuse the Bible of teaching salvation by works when it only teaches God’s plan of salvation, which really declares salvation by grace. Paul says our salvation is by grace through faith. Saving faith requires obedience to every law of God ([James 2:14-26](#)). We do not obey our own plan of salvation but God’s plan of salvation revealed by His grace. Therefore, there is no boasting. Truth is the word of God understood ([Romans 12:2](#); [Ephesians 5:17](#)). God’s sovereign will says, “I have a plan”. God’s grace is included in that plan.

## **The Grace and Mercy of God**

### **Is God's Grace Conditional or Unconditional? How Does Mercy Relate to Faith, Works, and Law in the Bible?**

**What blessings do God's grace and mercy offer us? Does the Bible say that gifts given by the grace of God are necessarily unconditional? Does salvation by grace through faith eliminate our need to meet conditions such as repentance, confession, baptism, and faithful living? Is the grace of God extended only to a few predestined people unconditionally elected before the world began? How do grace and mercy relate to works, law, and obedience in the Bible? Can we earn salvation? If not, does that eliminate the need for obeying commands to be saved? What does the Bible teach?**

Introduction:

One of the most important and beautiful Bible themes is the grace and mercy of God. No one can honestly claim to be familiar with the Bible and yet deny man's need for grace.

*Like most other important Bible doctrines, this one has become a focus of controversy.*

\* Universalism claims God's grace will save everyone.

\* Catholicism says the church hierarchy (clergy) dispenses God's grace through sacraments.

Hence, men must confess to the priest to be forgiven, etc.

\* Calvinism says God's grace is extended only to a limited, predestined few whom God unconditionally chose, regardless of their will, character, conduct, etc. And once God saves one of these elect, he can never fall from grace and be lost.

\* Protestant denominations generally teach salvation by "grace alone" and "faith only," so a man is saved on the basis of his attitude toward God only. Obedience is not necessary.

\* Some members of conservative churches teach that obedience is necessary to become a child of God, but after that one will remain in grace so long as he has a "good attitude," regardless of the fact that he continues to disobey God's word. Hence, they conclude we should not rebuke such people, but fellowship them despite their errors.

*The purpose of this study is to present a foundational study of the gospel teaching about God's grace and mercy.*

We will not consider in depth all the alternative views just listed. We will, however, give basic information that can be used to examine those views in more depth.

Consider some basic definitions:

"Grace" - "...good-will, loving-kindness, favor ... kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved ... NT writers use (grace) pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offences, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ ..." - Grimm-Wilke-Thayer. Hence, grace is "unmerited favor."

"Mercy" - "... kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them..." - Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.



So both grace and mercy involve kindness and favor toward those in unfortunate circumstances. Mercy emphasizes the wretched and miserable circumstances of the object of mercy, whereas grace emphasizes that they are unworthy or undeserving of favor.

[Bible passages regarding grace show that all three in the Godhead express mercy: the Father (Rom. 1:7; etc.), the Son (Rom. 16:20; etc.), and the Spirit (Heb. 10:29).]

In this study we will consider the following topics about God's grace:

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## Part 1 - What Does God's Grace Offer to Men?

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Why do we need grace? What can it do for us?

### A. God's Grace Offers Us Forgiveness of Sins.

Ephesians 1:7 - In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His **grace**. Note the importance of Jesus' blood in grace. Men ought to die eternally for our sins. But God's grace provided a sacrifice to die for us, so we do not have to die.

Ephesians 2:8 - For by **grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. "Save" means to rescue or deliver from harm or danger. Sin endangers our soul by dooming us to eternal punishment, but God offers deliverance. We do not deserve deliverance, so it is not of ourselves, but is a gift of God. Hence it is of **grace** - unmerited favor.

Titus 3:3-7 - By God's kindness, mercy, and grace, He saved and justified us. "Justify" means to declare one to be right or just - to pronounce one to be what he ought to be. We do not merit or deserve such a right standing before God on the basis of the deeds we have done. On the contrary, we have all sinned (Rom. 3:23), and sin deserves death (Rom. 6:23).

So based on our deeds, we all ought to be punished eternally. But God sent His Son to die for us so we can have eternal life instead - a gift we surely do not deserve. That is supreme grace or "unmerited favor." We ought to fall on our knees every day to thank God for it.

However, none of this proves we can be saved without doing anything. It does mean that nothing we do could ever *earn or merit* forgiveness.

[Titus 2:11-14; Rom 3:23-26; Luke 1:76-78; 2 Tim. 1:9; Acts 15:11; 20:32; Rom. 5:12-21; 4:2-8; 1 Tim. 1:13-16; 1 Peter 1:3-16]

### B. God's Grace Offers Us Fellowship with God.

Sin alienates or separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Forgiveness by grace reunites us into God's fellowship.

Romans 5:1-2 - Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God ... we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand. We are no longer enemies of God.

Ephesians 2:1-5,11-13,18,19 - Salvation by grace (v5,8) changes us from being dead in our sins (i.e., separated from God - v12), to being made alive (made nigh or reconciled so we have access to Him). This makes us His children, members of His house or family (v19).

Suppose someone repeatedly mistreated you and acted as an enemy. Would you want him in your family? Would you allow your son to die so that one could enter your family? That is what grace led God to do for us. [1 Peter 2:9,10]

### C. God's Grace Offers Us All Spiritual Blessings.

2 Thessalonians 2:16,17 - God loved us and gave us eternal **comfort and good hope** through grace.

Romans 5:1,2 - We have access to grace, so we **rejoice in the hope of glory**.

2 Timothy 2:1 - Be **strong** in the grace in Christ.

2 Corinthians 9:8 - God's grace makes us **all-sufficient in all things**, so we can abound in **all good works**. It provides all spiritual blessings we need to serve God.

[Psalm 84:11; 1 Peter 4:10,11; Rom. 12:6; Heb. 4:14-16; 2 Thess. 1:11,12; Acts 20:32]

### **D. God's Grace Offers Us Eternal Life.**

Titus 3:7 - Having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Acts 20:32 - The word of His grace is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

1 Peter 1:3,4,7 - By God's mercy we are begotten to a living hope reserved in Heaven ... praise, honor, and glory at Jesus' revelation (v7).

Who can search his life and honestly say he deserves such blessings as these? Yet God offers them anyway. That is "unmerited favor."

[1 Peter 5:10; 1 Tim. 1:13-16; Jude 21]

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## **Part 2 - How Can We Learn About God's Grace?**

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The doctrines of men regarding grace overflow with speculation.

Calvinists claim the Holy Spirit will act directly on man's heart, apart from the gospel, to give him "irresistible grace."

Others say, "Surely the grace of God will cover the sins" of a certain person or group. I ask, "How do you know that? Do you have a passage that says so?" Unable to provide such a passage, people nevertheless speculate endlessly.

How do we know what grace will or will not do? Do we have the right to say God's grace will cover certain sins, when we have no Scripture that says so?

### **A. The Only Means by Which Man Can Learn Anything about God's Grace Is the Gospel.**

There is no other way to know what grace will or will not do, or whom it will or will not save.

Ephesians 1:5-11 - We become God's sons according to God's **will** (v5). We have forgiveness according to His grace, which He made to abound to us, having made known to us the mystery of His **will**, according to His good pleasure which He **purposed** in Himself (v9). We inherit according to His **purpose**, and He works all things according to His **will** (v11).

Note that, in all these things, God's grace works according to His **will & purpose**. The one who extends favor has the right to decide how and to whom he will extend it.

A major point of Ephesians is that the mystery of God's will is **revealed** in the Scriptures (3:3-5; 1:9). Scriptures provide us to all good works (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Therefore, the only way to know anything about God's grace is through God's word!

2 Timothy 1:8-10 - God saved and called us according to His **purpose and grace**, revealed in Christ who brought life and immortality to light through the **gospel**. God's grace operates according to God's purpose. But the gospel reveals God's purpose. So if we want to understand grace, we must study the gospel!

We have no right to assume (let alone to teach) that God's grace will do anything except what the gospel says it will do. We must not expect it to save any except those whom His word says it will.

Acts 15:11 - Jews are saved by God's **grace** in the **same manner** as Gentiles. Note that God's grace saves in a certain **manner** - there is a way it operates. Further, His grace saves **all** men in the **same** manner. How do we know the manner in which Gentiles (and therefore all men) were saved?

V7 - Gentiles heard the **word of the gospel** and believed.

11:14 - Peter spoke to them **words** whereby there were saved (cf. 10:33-48). No one will be saved by direct operation of the Spirit apart from the word. Grace saves through the word.

Acts 20:24,32 - Paul's ministry was to testify the **gospel of the grace** of God. His preaching commended them to the **word of God's grace** (v32). Note the connection between grace and the word. The only way to understand grace is to learn of it through the word. [vv 20,21,25,26; 14:3]

Galatians 1:6-9 - We are called in Christ's grace. But if we follow another **gospel**, we remove ourselves from Him who called us in grace. If we preach another gospel, we are accursed. To receive the benefits of God's grace, we must follow the gospel. To follow other teachings removes us from grace. [5:4]

Titus 2:11,12 - The grace of God has appeared **teaching** us how to live. God's grace teaches! To know about grace, we must be taught. How can we be taught? By God's only revelation, the Scriptures.

[Col. 1:5,6; 1 Peter 5:12; 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:2; Gal. 6:16; John 1:17; Acts 4:33; Eph. 3:2-8]

## **B. What God's Grace Is Said to Do for Men, the Gospel Is Also Said to Do.**

This confirms what we just learned. What grace does, it does through the gospel.

*Note the connection in the following areas:*

### **Calling**

2 Timothy 1:9 - We are called according to grace. [Gal. 1:6]

2 Thessalonians 2:14 - We are called by the gospel.

### **Teaching**

Titus 2:11,12 - The grace of God appeared to all men teaching us.

2 Timothy 3:16,17 - The Scriptures teach & instruct us and provide us to all good works.

### **Producing faith**

Acts 18:27 - Disciples believed through grace.

Romans 10:17 - Faith comes by hearing God's word [John 20:30,31]

### **Saving**

Ephesians 2:5,8 - By grace are you saved. [2 Tim. 1:9; Acts 15:11]

Romans 1:16 - The gospel is God's power to save. [James 1:21; Acts 11:14]

### **Strengthening**

2 Timothy 2:1 - Be strong in the grace of Christ. [2 Thess. 2:16,17]

Colossians 1:9-11 - Be filled with knowledge of God's will that we may be strengthened with all might. [Acts 20:32; Rom. 16:25,26]

### **Giving eternal life**

Titus 3:7 - Being justified by grace, we are heirs of the hope of eternal life.

John 6:63,68 - Jesus' words are the words of eternal life.

### *Some applications*

When we teach that people who practice sin must repent and obey God to be saved, some people say we are "playing God," "putting ourselves in the place of God," or "limiting the grace of God." Yet those people sometimes say, "I just believe the grace of God will cover those people." The issue is: What does the Bible say? The only way to learn what God's grace will or will not do is to know what the word says.

If the Scriptures say that people who practice sin need to repent to please God, then we are not playing God when we preach that. We are simply teaching the word of God's grace: we are telling them what God says they must do to receive His grace!

If people say that God will save people who are practicing sin, but they cannot find a Scripture that so teaches, then why aren't *they* are the ones who have put themselves in the place of God? Why is it that only those who rebuke sin seem to be accused of "playing God"?

John 1:17 - Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. There is no conflict between grace and truth; they work together.

John 17:17 - But God's word is truth. So grace works according to God's word.

Only God can say what His grace will cover, and the only way to know is by what He says in the Bible. Whether we extend God's grace where His word does not extend, or whether we limit His grace where the word does not limit it, either way is equally "playing God." What we need is less speculation about grace and more "Thus saith the Lord."

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## Part 3 - Is Grace Conditional or Unconditional?

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Religious folks disagree about whether grace is received conditionally or unconditionally. Conditional grace means that, in order to receive forgiveness and in order to continue to receive the blessings that result from it, there are certain things a person must do. Whether or not one receives grace depends on his individual choice, how he acts, thinks, speaks, etc.

Unconditional grace means that forgiveness and resulting blessings are granted to individuals regardless of their choice or conduct. God grants them grace entirely on His own determination without consideration of their will, desires, or actions.

Here are a few of the many Scriptures to be considered. For other Scriptures please see our study of election and predestination at our Bible Instruction web site at <https://www.gospelway.com/instruct/>.

### A. General Examples of Conditional Grace

People often confuse **conditional** blessings with **merited** blessings. Since we cannot earn forgiveness, they conclude there can *be no* conditions. They say it is a denial of grace to say one must do anything to receive forgiveness.

But the Bible contains many examples of people who received God's blessings by grace, yet they had to meet conditions. Those who met the conditions received the blessings. Had they failed to meet the conditions, they would not receive the blessings. Nevertheless, meeting the conditions did not **earn** the blessing, so it was still a matter of grace.

#### *The fall of Jericho - Joshua 6:1-20*

V2 - God said He had **given** Jericho to Israel. Some say salvation is a gift, so we can do nothing to receive it (Eph. 2:8,9). But Jericho was also a gift. Did they have to do anything to receive it?

Vv 3-5 - To receive the gift, the people had to march around the city once each day for six days and seven times on the seventh day, blow horns, and shout. When they did so, the walls fell.

Consider some questions:

\* Was this a **favor** from God? Yes, it was His gift (v2).

\* Did marching, etc. **earn** the gift? No, marching does not merit the destruction of a walled city. This was unmerited favor - a blessing they did not earn - hence, they received it by grace.

\* But were there **conditions** the people had to meet to receive the gift? Yes. Would they have received it if they had not met the conditions? No. Hence, conditional grace!

Hebrews 11:30 - This very example illustrates the kind of faith we need to please God and be saved under the gospel system of grace (cf. 10:39; 11:6). Just as Israel's faith required obedience in order to receive God's gift by grace, so our faith requires obedience in order to receive the gift of salvation by grace. But it is still grace, because the conditions do not *earn* the gift.

***The cure of Naaman - 2 Kings 5:9-14***

Elisha told Naaman to dip 7 times in Jordan and his leprosy would be cured (v10). Naaman eventually did as he was told and was cured (v14). Questions:

- \* Was this a **favor** from God? Yes.
- \* Did dipping **earn** the gift? No, dipping 7 times in any river would not deserve the removal of leprosy. This was unmerited favor, hence grace.
- \* But were there **conditions** Naaman had to meet to receive the gift? Yes. Would he have received it if he had not met the conditions? No. Hence, conditional grace!

Grace can be conditional! The fact a person must do something does not necessarily contradict the concept of grace. Specifically, if dipping in water can be a condition for removing leprosy, yet it is still a gift by grace, then why can't dipping in water (baptism) likewise be a condition for removing of sin, yet it is still a gift by grace?

***Gideon's defeat of the Midianites - Judges 7:1-22***

With only 300 men, Gideon defeated an innumerable host of Midianites. Questions:

- \* Was this a **favor** from God? Yes. God said **He saved** Israel (vv 7,9).
- \* Did Israel **earn** the blessing? No, They held torches, blew trumpets, and shouted, but this would not deserve the defeat of such an army. This was unmerited favor, hence grace.
- \* But were there **conditions** Israel had to meet to receive the gift? Yes, they had to surround the enemy, hold torches, blow trumpets, and shout. Would they have received it if they had not met the conditions? No. Hence, conditional grace!

Note v2: God deliberately arranged this so the people **could not claim glory for themselves saying their own hand had saved them**. Yet there were still conditions they had to meet.

Note the parallel to Ephesians 2:8,9, a passage which teaches that salvation is a gift by grace, not of ourselves or of works. Many say this means there is nothing for us to do to receive salvation.

But note:

| <b>Israel &amp; Gideon (Judges 7)</b> | <b>Our salvation (Eph. 2:8,9)</b> |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| saved from Midian                     | saved from sin                    |
| a gift from God                       | a gift from God                   |
| by grace                              | by grace                          |
| not earned by human hands             | not earned by human works         |
| man cannot glory                      | man cannot boast                  |
| conditions (obedience) required       | conditions (obedience) required   |

***Noah's salvation from the flood - Genesis 6***

Vv 7,8 - Was Noah saved by grace? Yes, he found **grace** in the eyes of the Lord - unmerited favor. [Note: Prov. 3:24 uses the same word for "grace," but that verse is quoted in James 4:6, where the New Testament word for "grace" is used to translate it.]

Vv 13-15,22; 7:5 - Did Noah have to do anything to be saved by grace? Yes, he built the ark and did all that God commanded. Would he have been saved if he had not built the ark? No. Hence, conditional grace.

Hebrews 11:7 - Again, this very example is cited to teach us how we are saved from sin by faith (10:39; 11:6). The Old Testament example illustrates New Testament salvation by grace through faith, and both require meeting conditions. [1 Peter 3:20,21; Rom 15:4]  
[Other Bible examples of conditional grace: Exodus 17:1-6; Numbers 21:6ff; Genesis 19:19; Hebrews 11]

### ***Examples of conditional grace in everyday life***

\* A radio announcer offers a valuable prize to the seventh person to call in. This is a favor (gift) not earned, but conditions must be met to receive it.

\* A person's will grants one million dollars to an heir provided he is married, lives in a certain place, or meets some other requirement.

\* A donor gives a million dollars to a college if it names a building after him.

Grace can be conditional. The fact one must do something to receive a gift does not mean he earns it and does not disprove it is a gift by grace.

## **B. The Universal Nature of New Testament Grace**

We have proved that grace can be conditional. The existence of conditions does not eliminate grace. Consider now New Testament grace and specifically the grace by which God saves or forgives men of their sins. Is that grace conditional or not? Note first the universal nature of grace.

### ***Scriptures***

Titus 2:11 - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

Romans 11:32 - God has mercy on all, just as many as were in bondage to sin.

Hebrews 2:9 - By the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone. God wants all to be saved, so Jesus died for all (1 Tim. 2:4,6; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; Mark 16:15,16).

Romans 2:11 - God is no respecter of persons.

[Acts 10:34,35; 15:11 Rom. 5:15-21]

### ***Observations***

#### **This fact destroys Calvinistic unconditional election and limited atonement.**

Strict Calvinism denies that God's grace is truly available to all or that Jesus truly died for all. It says Jesus' death offers saving grace only to those whom God unconditionally chose before the world began. All others are lost and cannot receive grace.

But the above passages contradict this view by proving that God's grace is extended to all and Jesus died for all. The Calvinistic view of grace makes God a respecter of persons by saying that grace and the benefits of Jesus' death are extended only to a few regardless of their choice or conduct.

#### **Further, these verses leave only two choices:**

(1) If God's grace is unconditional, then ***all people will be saved***, since His grace extends to all. This is universalism, but it contradicts passages showing many will be lost (Matt. 7:13,14,21-23; 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-9; etc.).

(2) The only other alternative is that salvation by grace is received ***conditionally***. It is offered to all, but each individual must choose whether or not he will meet the conditions. Hence, God is no respecter of persons for He offers salvation to all. Yet many will be lost, because they refuse to meet the conditions.

The only way to harmonize the Bible teaching that God's grace is for all and that God is not a respecter of persons with the fact that many will be lost is to recognize that grace is conditional. Now consider Bible examples that confirm this.

### C. Gospel Examples of Salvation by Grace

Were people who were saved by grace under the gospel required to meet conditions? In particular, was baptism a necessary condition to their forgiveness of sins?

#### *Jews*

Acts 15:7-11 - Jews ("we") are saved through grace "in the same manner" (NKJV & ASV, "even as" - KJV) Gentiles ("they"). **Grace saves in a certain manner or way. That manner is the same for all, Jew or Gentile.** What is that manner? Is it conditional or not?

Note first the Jewish converts in Acts 2:36-41.

Acts 2:14,38 - Peter **spoke** to them. They had to be told what to do. Grace works according to God's revealed word, not in some mystical speculative way.

V36 - They had to know assuredly (**believe**) in Jesus.

V38 - They had to **repent and be baptized for remission of sins**. 3000 did so (v41).

Did these Jews earn salvation? No more so than did Naaman, Gideon, Noah, etc. The work done did not earn the gift received. But was obedience necessary to receive the gift? Absolutely.

Hence, conditional grace.

#### *Gentiles*

Acts 15:11 says Jews and Gentiles would be saved in the same manner. So consider the conversion of Cornelius, the first recorded Gentile convert.

Acts 11:14; 10:33ff - Cornelius was required to **hear words** whereby he could be saved. He gathered with his friends to **hear** what Peter would say. [15:7]

10:43 - Peter said people must **believe** to receive remission. Later, he retold the event saying they **heard the word of the gospel and believed** (15:7). So their hearts were cleansed by **faith** (15:9).

11:18 - God granted the Gentiles **repentance** unto life.

10:34,35 - Those who **work** righteousness are accepted by God.

10:47,48 - In telling them words whereby they could be saved, Peter commanded them to be **baptized** in water.

Jew and Gentile are saved by the grace of God in the same manner. It is conditional, and the conditions are always the same! And those conditions include baptism.

#### *Paul*

1 Timothy 1:13-16 - Paul was saved by the **grace** of God, and he was a **pattern** for others who believe for eternal life. Further, he is the apostle who emphasized the doctrine of salvation by grace. So was his own salvation a pattern of conditional or unconditional grace?

Acts 9:1-6 - Paul had been a persecutor, but Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus' road. He told him to go into the city to be **told what he must do**. There were things he **must do**, and he had to be **told** them. (Clearly he believed and repented at this point.)

9:18; 22:16 - There he was baptized because the man God sent to tell him what to do said to be **baptized and wash away his sins**.

Paul, the apostle who taught salvation by grace, himself was saved by conditional grace, including baptism to have his sins washed away.

#### *The Romans*

Romans 5:1,2 - The book of Romans is an essay on salvation by grace through faith under the gospel. Was the salvation of the Romans conditional or unconditional? We are justified by **faith** because, by **faith**, we have access to grace. [3:22-26; 4:2-8,14-16; 10:14]

1:16; 10:17 - The **gospel** is God's power to save all who **believe**. **Faith** comes by **hearing God's word**.

1:5; 16:26 - But, as with all other examples so far, this must be an **obedient faith**. What specific obedience is required?

2:4-10 - God's goodness leads men to **repent**. Those who will not repent, will receive wrath at judgment.

10:9,10 - One must have **faith** in his heart, but it must be obedient faith, for one must **confess** with the mouth to be saved. If grace was unconditional, then neither faith nor confession would be needed.

6:3,4,17,18 - To be made free from sin one must **obey** the teaching delivered. This includes baptism, since in **baptism** we come into Christ and into His death, so we walk in a new life (born again).

Paul's essay on salvation by grace shows that grace is conditional, and the conditions include baptism. Forgiveness is a gift we do not deserve, but one must meet the conditions to receive it.

### ***Ephesians***

Ephesians 2:5,8,9 - The Ephesians themselves ("you") are an example of salvation by grace through faith. So let us examine their conversion. Was this conditional grace or unconditional?

1:7,13 - They were forgiven by grace after they **heard the word of truth** and **believed**. Paul told the Ephesian elders that in Ephesus he had testified to the **gospel of God's grace** (Acts 20:24,27,32). We are saved by grace through **faith** (Eph. 2:8,9). But faith is a condition one must meet to be saved. If grace is unconditional, why is faith needed? [Acts 19:8,10]

Acts 20:20,21 - Paul taught, not just faith in Jesus, but also **repentance** toward God. [19:8,19]

Acts 19:5 - As a result of Paul's preaching, men were **baptized**.

### ***1 Peter 3:20,21***

Noah was saved by grace, but it was conditional. He had to obey, but his obedience did not earn his blessing.

Specifically, water separated Noah (who received grace) from those wicked people who were condemned. This illustrates our salvation by grace because, in our case too, water is essential to our salvation. **Baptism saves us.**

The power is not in water to save, nor does baptism earn salvation. The power is in Christ's death and resurrection. But when we have obedient faith, as Noah had, so we meet the conditions of salvation, then we are saved by grace through faith, even as Noah was.

[Acts 18:27; 8:22; John 1:12-17; Gal. 5:4-6; Titus 3:3-8; Heb. 12:14,15]

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## **Part 4 - What Is the Relationship Between Grace, Law, and Works?**

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Since God's word is truth (John 17:17), and truth never contradicts itself, we know there are no contradictions in the Bible. However, many people are confused about grace because some passages appear to them to be contradictory.

Consider some examples:

|   |
|---|
| We are saved by grace through faith, not of works (Eph. 2:8,9)<br>But we are justified by works, not by faith only (James 2:24) |
|---|

Again,

|  |
|--|
| If salvation is of grace, it is not of works (Rom. 11:6)<br>But He who fears God and works righteousness is accepted before Him (Acts 10:35) |
|--|

And,



We are not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14)  
Yet Paul said he was "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21).

[See also Titus 3:3-7; 2 Timothy 1:9; Romans 4:5]

One reason people are confused about such matters is that they study only part of what the Bible says and do not put it all together. Another reason is that people ignore passages that seem to teach different from what they have believed and been taught. So they may study certain passages that teach about grace but then ignore other passages. The result is confusion. If the Bible does not contradict itself, there must be harmony. Let us study Bible teaching about grace, law, and works, taking passages on all these concepts and putting them together.

### A. Different Uses of Terms

Studying various passages will show us that the same word can have different meanings in different contexts. One reason people are confused is that they assume a word has one certain meaning, then they try to force that meaning on all contexts.

Examples in this study are:

#### *Grace*

Grace means unmerited favor - a blessing or gift that one receives, though it is not earned by the one who receives it. But the same word can refer to different kinds of grace.

\* **Unconditional grace** in which one receives a favor but has no choice in the matter. The favor is given regardless of the choice, character, life, or conduct of the receiver.

\* **Conditional grace** in which a gift is offered, but to receive it one must do certain things or act in certain ways. God's grace makes the gift available, but the person has the power to choose to do or not do whatever is required to receive it. Yet what is done does not earn the gift.

Either of these definitions can fit the meaning of grace. Only context tells what is meant in a particular instance. Many people assume grace must be unconditional, but this leads to false conclusions because, as we have already proved, the grace of the gospel is conditional.

#### *Law*

Law simply means a command, rule, or precept (or a collection of commands) that a person is expected to obey. But again the New Testament mentions several different *kinds* of law.

[Everyone obeys some law - Rom. 6:16,19.]

\* **The law of sin** - Romans 7:23 [7:25; 8:2]. This is the principle by which one obeys his own will or the will of someone else other than God (actually he is obeying Satan). Note that 7:22,23 says this law is different from the law of God.

\* **The law of works** - Romans 3:27. Note that this is different from the law of faith. The Law of Moses is an example of a law of works. When we study more about this kind of law later, we will see that the gospel is *not* this kind of law.

\* **The law of Christ** (Galatians 6:2), also called "law of faith" (Rom. 3:27), "law of God" (Rom. 8:7), "law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2), or "law of liberty" (James 1:25; 2:12). 1 Cor. 9:20,21 says this is a law, but it is not the (Mosaic) law that the Jews were subject to.

Again, all of these fit the definition of law, but they are different laws. Only the context tells which is meant in a particular case.

Often people become confused because they assume that there can only be one kind of law. They read passages saying we are not saved by a law of works (like the Old Testament), then they assume this means there is no law at all involved in our salvation. When we realize there are different kinds of laws, then we see how we may *not* be saved by certain kinds of laws, yet there still may be a kind of law that is necessary to our salvation.

#### *Works*

Works means deeds, actions, things a person does. But again there are different *kinds* of deeds mentioned in different contexts in the New Testament.

\* **Works of the flesh** - Galatians 5:19-21. These are acts that violate God's law and are therefore sinful (this is parallel to the law of sin). These works do not save but rather condemn us. [Rom. 13:12-14]

\* **Works of the law** (or works of human righteousness) - Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:28 [Titus 3:5]. These are deeds done as part of a "law of works." Again, we will discuss these at length later and will see that these cannot justify and are not the works of the gospel.

\* **Works of faith** or deeds done in obedience to the gospel - 1 Thessalonians 1:3 [Galatians 5:6]. These deeds result from faith as part of a law of faith. These are done, not to earn a gift, but to meet conditions to receive a blessing one does not deserve. [1 Cor. 15:58; John 6:28,29] Again, all of these fit the definition of works, yet they are different kinds of works. Only context can tell which is meant in a particular case.

But people read passages saying we are not saved by works, then they assume this means that no deeds of any kind are involved in our salvation. But when we realize that the gospel mentions different kinds of works, then we understand that, though there are kinds of works which do not save us, yet other kinds of works may still be essential to salvation.

This is the solution to the problem of apparent contradiction between passages. Some verses say we are not saved by works of law, yet others say we are saved by works and must submit to law to be saved. The only possible solution is that the passages are discussing different kinds of law and different kinds of works.

## **B. Does the Gospel Include Law (Commands) and Works (Obedience)?**

Many denominations, in order to belittle the importance of obedience (especially baptism), have denied that the New Testament is a law. They deny that obedience in any form is essential to salvation.

Some members of "institutional" and even some "conservative" churches ones are making similar statements. I once heard a preacher say, "The New Testament is not a code of laws. It is a group of love letters."

Like most false doctrines, this contains just enough truth to camouflage the error. The implication is that love is important, but obedience is not essential. So they conclude that, when church members disobey the Bible, if they seem sincere, we should love them so much we will overlook their disobedience and continue to fellowship them. If we insist people must repent, some folks call us "legalists," and accuse us of trusting commandment keeping for salvation.

### ***Is law an essential aspect of the New Testament?***

We agree that the New Testament is not a system of justification by works of law. But is law in any sense an essential ingredient of the gospel?

Galatians 6:2 - We must **fulfill the law of Christ**. Christ has a law, and we are expected to fulfill it.

1 Corinthians 9:20,21 - Paul was "**not without law to God, but under law to Christ**." Some people say we are not under law at all. Paul denies this. He was not under the law Jews were subject to (law of Moses), but this did not mean he was without law. He was still under law to Christ.

Isaiah 2:2,3 - When God established His house (the church - 1 Tim. 3:15), **God's law would go forth from Jerusalem**. [Acts 2; Luke 24:47]

James 2:8 - Love your neighbor is the **royal law**. If obedience to law is not required under the New Testament, then love is not required, for **love is a law!** Love and law do not necessarily

conflict. To say love eliminates law is to misunderstand both love and law. [Cf. Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14]

1 John 3:4 - **Sin is transgression of law**. If we are not subject to law, then there can be no such thing as sin. If we are not required to obey law, then it would not matter if we commit sin. Those who claim we are without law are in effect defending sin, for the essence of sin is lawlessness (NKJV).

Yet all people commit sin (1 John 1:8,10; Rom. 3:23). And sin is what we need God's grace to forgive (Eph. 1:7). If obedience to law is not necessary, then sin is not a problem, and we would not need grace to forgive our sins. **To eliminate law is to eliminate our need for grace!**

Folks who say we are not under law, have denied our need for grace. To say obedience is not essential is to belittle our need for grace and for Jesus' death.

[Heb. 8:10; Rom. 3:27; James 1:25; 2:8,12]

*Are works an essential aspect of the gospel?*

Again, we agree that there is a sense in which we are not justified by works of law. But does this mean that no works of any kind are in any way necessary for us to be saved?

Galatians 5:6 - In Christ Jesus what avails is faith **working** through love.

Acts 10:34,35 - In every nation, he who fears God and **works** righteousness is accepted.

James 1:22,25 - Be **doers** of the word, not just hearers. If one is a **doer** of the **work**, he is blessed in what he **does**.

James 2:14-26 - Can one be **saved** by a faith that does not **work** (v14)? Such a faith is dead.

Works and faith go together, so by **works** a man is justified and not by faith only.

Romans 2:6-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10 - We will be judged and rewarded in eternity for our **works**.

We receive eternal life for **well-doing, working** what is good.

[John 6:28,29; Phil. 2:12; John 5:28,29; 1 John 2:17; 1 Thess. 1:3; Acts 9:6]

*Are commands an essential aspect of the gospel?*

By definition, a law is a command or collection of commands. Those who belittle law also belittle the importance of keeping commands. But note passages showing how important commands are:

Matthew 22:37-39 - Love for God and man are the greatest **commands**. To say we must love is to say we must keep commands, for love is a command. To deny the need for obeying commands is to deny the necessity of love. [Note that comparing this passage to James 2:8 shows that law = command.]

John 14:15; 1 John 5:3 - If we love God, we will keep His **commands**. Love and commandment keeping are not antagonistic. They must go together. To say you do not believe commands are necessary is to admit you do not have a proper love! [John 14:21-24; 2 John 6]

1 John 2:3-6 - **To know and abide in God, we must keep His commands**. To say that command keeping is not essential is to admit you do not know God!

1 John 3:23 - **Faith is a command**. Those who say commands are not essential to salvation, are unintentionally saying that faith is not essential, for faith is a command.

Acts 17:30,31 - God **commands** all men everywhere to **repent**. To say that commands are not essential is to say that repentance is not essential, for repentance is a command. But God says that without it we will perish (2 Peter 3:9; Luke 13:3,5).

Acts 10:47,48 - **Baptism** in water is a **command**. But many passages show that it is essential to salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Rom. 6:3,4).

Most folks willingly accept that faith and repentance are essential, despite the fact they are commands. The main command people insist is unneeded is baptism. But commandment keeping

is either essential to salvation, or it is not. If keeping commands is not necessary, then love, faith, and repentance are not necessary. But if we admit keeping commands is necessary, then why oppose the necessity of baptism?

[Matt. 28:18-20; John 12:47-50; 1 Cor. 14:37]

***Is obedience an essential aspect of the gospel?***

Again by definition, law is simply that which should be **obeyed**. If law is not necessary under the gospel, then neither is obedience. But if obedience is necessary, then so is the law.

Romans 6:17,18 - Having just said that we are not under law but under grace, Paul says we are **made free from sin when we obey** the doctrine delivered.

Hebrews 5:9 - Jesus is author of eternal salvation to all who **obey Him**.

Matthew 7:21-27 - To enter the kingdom of heaven, we must **do** the will of the Father. It is not enough just to learn Jesus' teaching or claim to believe Jesus is Lord.

1 Peter 1:22 - We purify our souls in **obeying** the truth.

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 - Those who do not **obey** the gospel will be punished in flaming fire.

[Rom. 1:5; 16:26]

It is true that the gospel is not a system of justification by works of law, yet it is also true that the gospel is a law in which works and obedience to commands are essential to receive salvation.

But remember that words like "law," "works," etc. can mean different things.

Let us study further to determine in what sense the gospel is a law that requires works and in what sense it is not a law of works. We will also see how all this harmonizes with grace.

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## **Part 5 - A Comparison of Two Systems of Justification**

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To understand the relationship between grace, faith, works, and obedience in salvation, let us study the gospel contrast between two systems of justification.

| <b>Works of Law</b>        | <b>Grace through Faith</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Sinlessly perfect lifetime | Sinner can be justified    |
| Sins remembered            | Lasting forgiveness        |
| Must earn justification    | Justification unearned     |
| Based on man's effort      | Based on Jesus' death      |
| Man boasts in self         | Glory goes to God          |
| Man trusts self            | Man trusts Jesus           |
| No one is saved            | All can be saved           |

### **A. Works of Law as a System of Justification**

One way "works of law" is used is to refer to a system or fundamental principle of justification: one stands righteous before God simply and entirely because he has properly kept commands. This is basically the kind of law the Old Testament was, and this is the kind of law the New Testament refers to when it says we are not saved by "works of law." The gospel is not a "law of works" in this sense.

Note some characteristics of works of law as a system of justification (many references here are speaking of the Old Testament law, but the principle would apply to any law of the same kind as the Old Testament).

***Justification by this system requires a lifetime of sinless perfection.***

To stand righteous before God at judgment, one would have to live his whole lifetime without ever violating any of God's commands.

Galatians 3:10-12 - One who does not continue in **all** things written in the law is under a curse. This is quoted from Deut. 27:26 and describes a law system like the Old Testament. Here people are not justified on the basis of forgiveness, but one must do everything the law commands so he never stands guilty. [James 2:10; Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5]

The only person who ever lived a sinless life under the law was Jesus (Heb. 4:15). To stand justified under such a law, one would have to live a sinless life like Jesus did.

***No permanent forgiveness was provided.***

Hebrews 10:1-4,11 - The law had animal sacrifices which could not permanently remove sin. Sins were remembered every year.

If a person ever sinned under such a system, that law of itself could never give lasting forgiveness. Such sinners could only hope that some other arrangement would come later to justify them. Jesus' death accomplished this - His blood reached back to give lasting forgiveness to those under the Old Testament (Heb. 9:15). But the law itself that those people lived under did not provide lasting forgiveness. Had Jesus not come and died, they would have had no hope. This is why justification under such a system required a whole lifetime of sinless perfection. If anyone ever sinned, he was under a curse of death (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23), but the law itself could provide no lasting forgiveness. [Galatians 3:21]

"Works of law," as a system of justification, refers to ***law alone - without forgiveness***. One is justified under such a system entirely and only because he never did anything wrong.

***Justification must be earned by works of merit.***

Romans 4:4 - The only way to achieve righteousness under such a system would be to earn it as a matter of debt.

If a person lived a sinless life, he would earn righteousness. He would deserve for God to consider him right, because he never did anything wrong. God could not rightly punish him, because he did not deserve punishment. He is justified, not because his sins have been forgiven, but because he never committed any sins for which he needed forgiveness.

This is how "works" and "law" are used throughout the context of Rom. 4. Remember these words can also have other meanings; but the only meaning that could fit this context is sinless perfection, since this is the only kind of works that would earn righteousness as a matter of debt. Any man who sins deserves punishment (Rom. 6:23), so the only way to earn righteousness would be to never sin.

***The source or power behind justification would be human ability.***

Romans 4:4 - The person must save himself by his own goodness. If he ever does anything wrong, he can never be righteous; so he must rely on his own strength to live without sin. [Judges 7:2]

***Man can then boast in his own achievement.***

Romans 4:2 - If man deserved to be righteous because he never committed any sin, he could brag about his accomplishment [cf. Judges 7:2]. Again note that "works" here must refer to a life of sinlessness, for that is the only kind of works in which a man could boast of his salvation. If he ever sinned and needed forgiveness, he would have nothing to brag about.

***Man trusts in himself. Christ is not needed.***

If a man saved himself by a sinless life, he would not need forgiveness. Hence, we would not need to trust in Jesus' sacrifice. Obviously God knew men would not be saved on the basis of a sinless life, else why send Jesus to die? [Gal. 2:21; Rom. 4:14]

***Since all men sin, this system will save no one.***

Romans 3:20,23 - All are guilty of sin, therefore by works of law (a sinless life) no one will be justified. The law provided no means for lasting forgiveness, so the only way to be justified under that system was to live without sin. No one ever did this (but Jesus), so no one could ever be saved under that system.

In the end, what the law did accomplish was to prove to men that they were sinners who did not deserve eternal life (v20).

[Gal. 3:10-12; 2:15,16; Acts 13:38,39]

Passages, like those above, are often used to try to prove that acts of obedience (especially baptism) are unnecessary under the *gospel*. However, they prove no such thing, because "the law" in these contexts does not refer to the gospel, and "works of law" does not refer to obedience to the gospel conditions of forgiveness. Rather, these terms refer to a sinless life whereby one *earns* salvation, because he has never sinned. They refer to an entirely different system of justification than the gospel.

**B. Grace through Faith as a System of Justification.**

We earlier studied examples showing that the gospel is a system of salvation by grace through faith, yet it still requires obedience to conditions in order for a person to receive forgiveness.

Hence, it is conditional, yet it is still a system of grace.

Let us now summarize justification by grace through faith as a system of justification, contrasting it to works of law as a system of justification.

***A lifetime of sinless perfection is not required.***

Romans 3:23,24 - Under this system, even those who have sinned can be justified. Though we have sinned, yet we can be justified on the basis of forgiveness. That is grace (unmerited favor).

[Rom. 5:1,2; Titus 3:3,7]

***Lasting forgiveness is available to those who meet the conditions.***

Ephesians 1:7 - We have redemption and forgiveness through Jesus' blood according to grace.

[2:8,9; Rom. 4:5-7]

Hebrews 10:11-14,17 - Animal sacrifices could not completely remove sin. This is why they had to be repeated. But Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice, which removes sins so completely they are never again remembered.

We learned earlier that this forgiveness is offered to all men (Titus 2:11,12). But there are conditions men must meet to receive it. If one is not a child of God, those conditions include hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized (Acts 15:7-11; 2:38; 10:34-48; 22:16; Rom. 10:9-17; 6:3-18; etc.). For a child of God who sins, the conditions are repentance and prayer (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

***Justification by grace does not merit or earn forgiveness.***

Romans 4:4-7 - It is a matter of grace, not of debt. Again, "works" in this context must refer to a life of sinless perfection. That would earn justification without grace. [11:6; 6:14f]

But righteousness by grace means salvation for those who "work not" or "apart from works of the law." These "works" are the ones referred to in vv 2,4 (sinless perfection) [cf. 3:21,28].

Hence, justification by faith means, even though people have not lived a sinless life, yet they can be saved by grace.

V7 explains how this happens: it is by *forgiveness* of sins. If he kept the law without ever sinning, man would earn salvation by works of law. But if he sins and needs forgiveness, that requires grace.

Salvation by grace apart from works does not mean there are no commands to obey to be saved. Multitudes of other passages show we must obey the conditions of forgiveness. What it means is that we are saved by forgiveness, and therefore we have not earned salvation by a sinless life.

***The source or power that provides forgiveness is Jesus' death.***

Hence, salvation is based, not on human effort, but on Jesus' sacrifice (Eph. 1:7). [Eph. 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rom. 3:24,25]

Forgiveness can be obtained only through the blood of Jesus. By the grace of God, Jesus died to offer us salvation. Hence, salvation is a gift, not based on or provided by human effort.

Again, all passages that say salvation is not of works or not of law mean that it is not achieved on the basis of human ability whereby man earns salvation by living a sinless life.

It is not the intent of such passages to deny that man must meet conditions to receive forgiveness.

The point is that man is not the *source* of the *power* on which righteousness is based. God is the source of the righteousness, because He forgives man's sins on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice.

***God receives the glory. Human boasting is excluded.***

Ephesians 2:8,9 - If someone had lived a sinless life and thereby earned salvation, then he could boast. But if a man has sinned and ought to be punished, but God by mercy offers him forgiveness, that man has forever forfeited his right to boast about his salvation. Instead, he should praise God for grace. [Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:29-31]

When passages like these warn against boasting, you know that the works being discussed do not refer to conditions whereby one is forgiven. There can be no boasting in forgiveness. So passages that warn against boasting must be warning against works of law whereby one earns justification by living a sinless life.

Specifically, passages that exclude works of boasting cannot possibly be excluding baptism. If a person is baptized for forgiveness, he cannot possibly have grounds for boasting. The whole point of baptism is to admit that the one being baptized is a sinner and has come with humble heart pleading with God to forgive him, not boasting about his human achievements. This is what Ephesians 2:8,9 and such passages are teaching. [Cf. Judges 7:2]

***Faith in Christ is required.***

Ephesians 2:8; John 3:16 - Under a system of justification by works, one who lived a sinless life would not need Jesus' death. He would have saved himself by trusting in human ability. But since no one will be saved that way, then everyone needs faith in Jesus. [Rom. 3:22,26; 4:24; Luke 18:9-14; etc.]

When one admits that he has sinned and needs forgiveness - when He comes pleading with God to forgive Him by Jesus' blood - then he is not trusting his own ability. When He meets the conditions that Jesus requires in order to be forgiven, then he is manifesting faith, not in himself, but in Jesus. That is exactly what salvation by faith requires!

When people today deny that obedience is necessary, they claim that they do this because they believe we are saved by the grace of God and faith in Jesus. Actually, they show that they do not understand what the Bible says about obedience, but neither do they understand what it says about grace and faith.

When people really trust in Jesus, they will do whatever He says to do to receive forgiveness!

When Jesus tells us what we must do to be saved but we deny we need to do that, then we show that we don't really believe in Him!

***This system of justification places salvation within the reach of all men.***

Acts 13:38,39 - Men could not be justified by the law of Moses, because it required a sinless life. Since all men sinned, such a system put salvation out of reach. [Acts 15:10,11]

Under the gospel, men can obtain forgiveness through Jesus in spite of their sins. That makes salvation available to everyone, because Jesus' died for everyone and everyone can meet the conditions.

The difference between justification by a system of works and justification by grace through faith is not that one requires obedience and the other does not. Both require obedience. In a nutshell the difference is that the first lacks lasting forgiveness and therefore makes salvation impossible for all who have sinned, whereas the second makes salvation available by offering real forgiveness of sin.

### **Conclusion**

When we properly understand the gospel teaching about grace, works, and law, we learn that we should not belittle the importance of God's conditions for receiving forgiveness. We should respect those conditions and obey them. Neither should we belittle the importance of living a pure life, since one of the conditions of forgiveness is repentance, which requires us to commit ourselves to living a pure life.

Having met the conditions for forgiveness, however, we must not become self-righteous as though we deserve to receive eternal life or have earned it by our own goodness. Rather, we must recognize we are sinners who deserve to be punished, yet by God's grace we have been forgiven and offered eternal life.

That is grace indeed, and ought to lead us to forever praise God for His grace and Jesus for His death.

| <b>Works of Law</b>        | <b>Grace through Faith</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Sinlessly perfect lifetime | Sinner can be justified    |
| Sins remembered            | Lasting forgiveness        |
| Must earn justification    | Justification unearned     |
| Based on man's effort      | Based on Jesus' death      |
| Man boasts in self         | Glory goes to God          |
| Man trusts self            | Man trusts Jesus           |
| No one is saved            | All can be saved           |



## Salvation by Grace Through Faith

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph.2:8)*

### FAITH

Working Faith (Jas.2:22) (Gal.5:6)

➔

*“We have access by faith into this grace” (Rom.5:1)*

## GRACE

*“Not by faith only” (Jas.2:24)*

**“FAITH ONLY”**



*“Faith without works is dead” (Jas.2:20)*

9

## Access by Faith Into This Grace

“Not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph.2:8)

BY *The Israelites looked at the bronze serpent (Num.21:8-9)*

FAITH

➔

“lived”

“the walls fell”

## GRACE

“clean”

“seeing”

BY *The Israelites marched around Jericho (Heb.11:30)*

FAITH

“not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24)

BY *Naaman dipped 7 times in the Jordan river (2 Ki. 5:10-14)*

FAITH

“not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24)

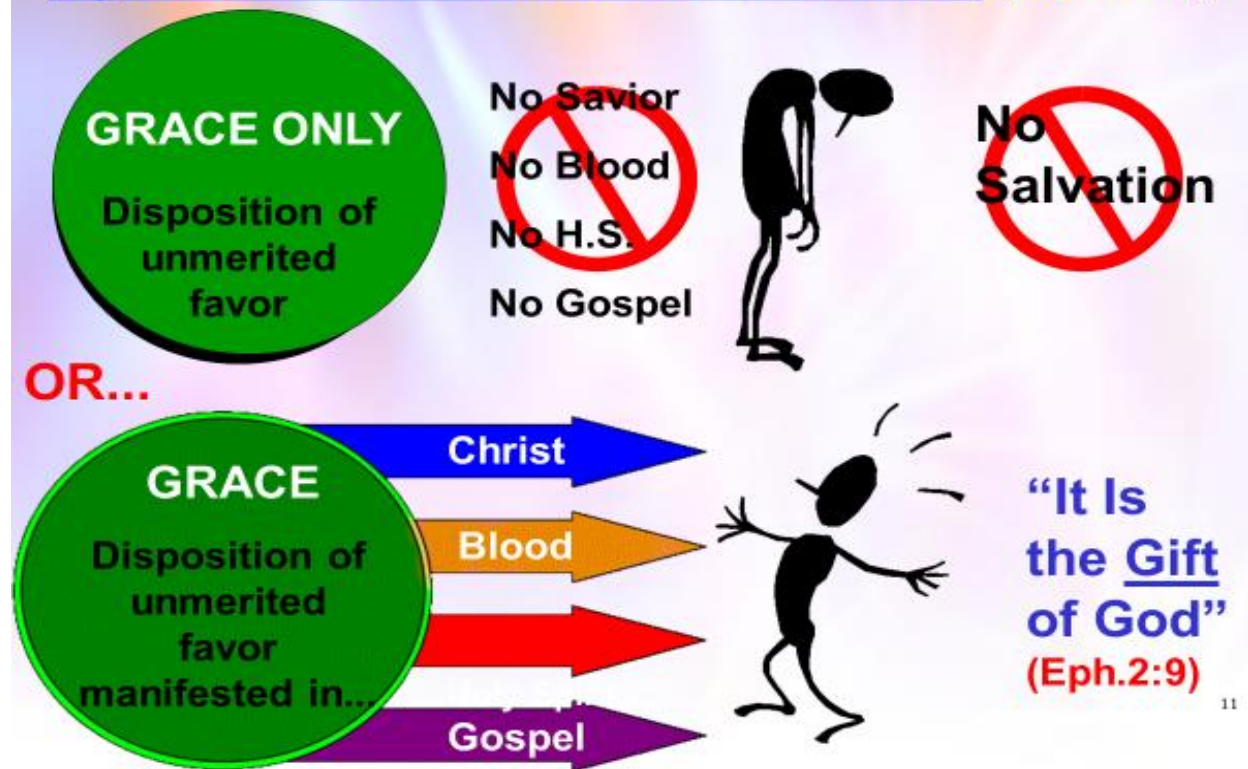
BY *The blind man washed in the pool of Siloam (Jn.9:7)*

FAITH

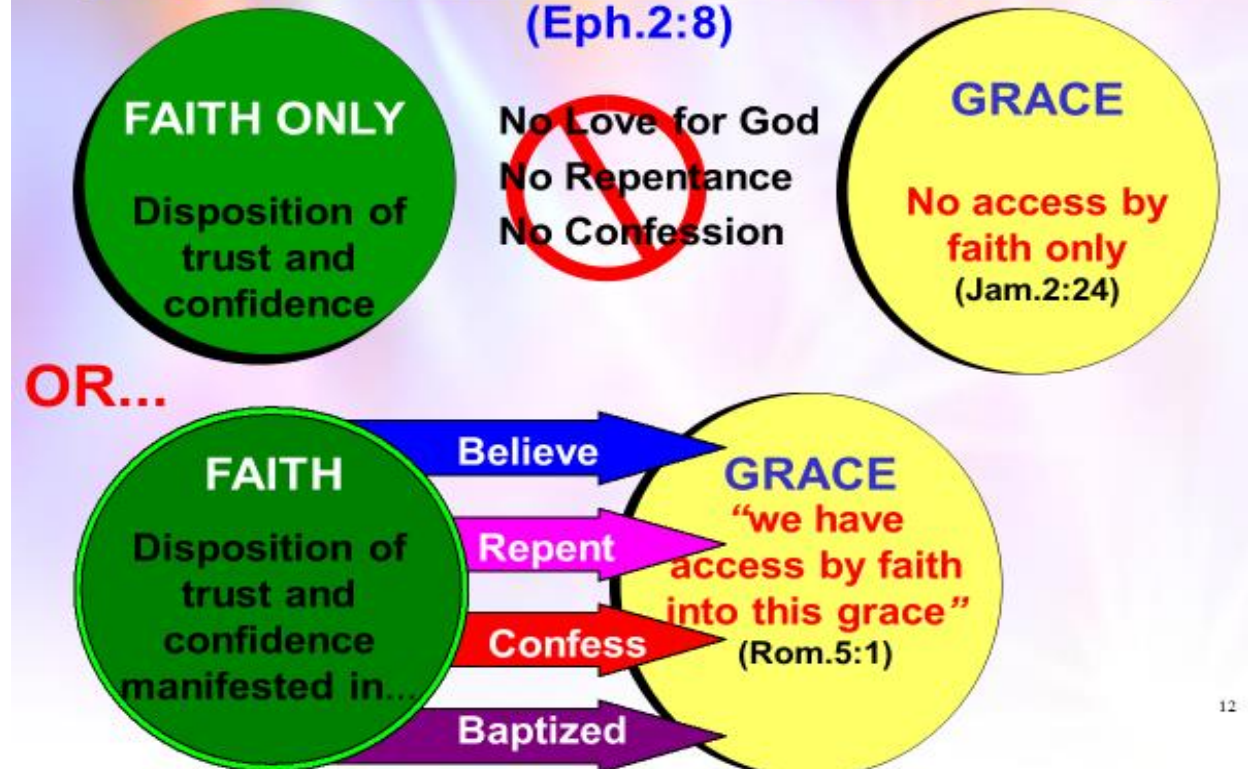
“not by faith only” (Jam. 2:24)

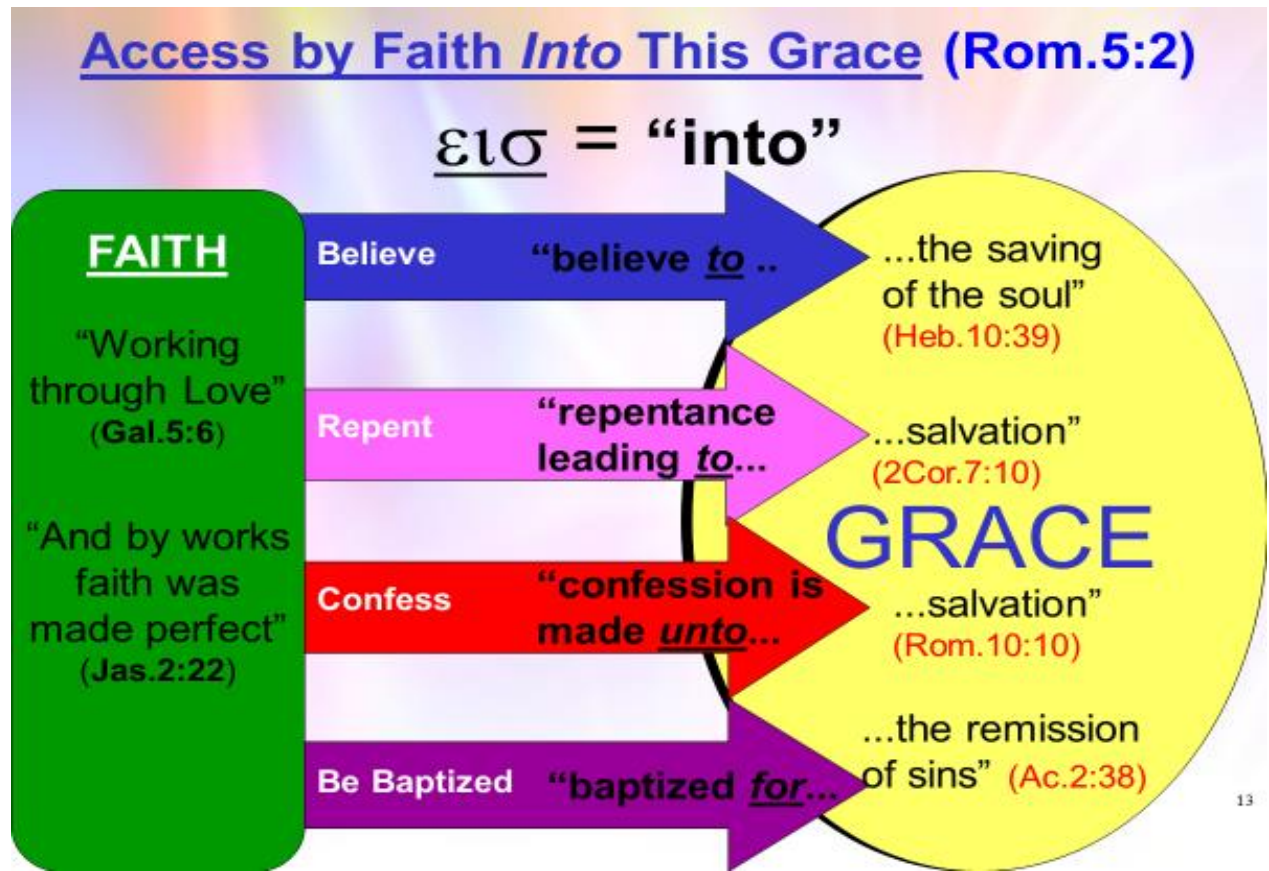
10

## By Grace You Have Been Saved (Eph.2:8)



## You Have Been Saved Through Faith (Eph.2:8)





# GOD'S GRACE: BOOK\CHAPTER\VERSE

## BOOK OF ROMANS INTRODUCTION:

“Romans is a rare thing in religion: an explanation. Scripture is full of stories, visions, parables, proverbs, genealogies, poetry, prophecy, and even history. These are priceless. But beyond an occasional gloss, interpreted dream, or decoded parable, we’re never given anything like what Paul offers. We’re never given ten thousand words of raw explanation. With extraordinary insight and psychological precision, Paul lays bare the underlying logic of the gospel. He explains what sin is and why we choose it, the relationship between sin and grace, how sin abuses God’s law and subverts religion, how Jesus saves us from death and sin, and what a new life in Christ looks like, both individually and collectively. The view is staggering.

It’s my argument that the deep logic of Romans comes into sharp focus around a single premise: Paul’s claim that grace is not God’s backup plan. Paul never quite puts it like this, but he implies it at every turn.

To make sense of Romans, we have to surrender a very natural assumption. We have to stop pretending that the world revolves around us. We have to let God be the center of the universe.

We have to stop looking at God's grace from the perspective of our sin and, instead, let sin appear in light of grace. And this grace is everywhere. God's work of creation is a grace. His work of sustaining that created world is a grace. His willingness to shape us in his image and let us make our own way is a grace. His gift of the law is a grace. His Son is a grace. And his willingness to stand by us, regardless of our weakness or wanderings, is a grace.

This, though, is what sin can't abide. Sin wants to be the star of the show. From the perspective of sin, everything is about sin. As Paul describes it, sin is an active suppression of God's already obvious glory. It's a rejection of his already offered grace. Sin likes to think that it came first and that grace, then, is God's stopgap response. Sin acts as if God's original plan was for us to bootstrap ourselves into holiness by way of the law and then, when this didn't quite pan out, God offered his grace—but only the bare minimum—to make good the difference and boost us into righteousness.

**This is exactly backwards. Grace is not God's backup plan. Jesus is not plan B. God's boundless grace comes first & sin is what follows. Grace isn't God's response to sin.**

**Sin is our embarrassed, improvised, rebellious rejection of God's original grace. On Paul's telling, sin isn't just a name for our occasional, local lapses. Paul doesn't talk about sins, plural. Rather, sin names a whole way of being in the world. It's a name for the underlying sickness that links our local mistakes and defies our conscious choices. Sin abuses God's gifts and subverts them to its own end. It takes God's law, severs it from grace, and repurposes it as a wedge. Sin doesn't oppose religion, it hijacks it. It coopts religion itself as a way of alienating us from God.**

**Sin recasts the law as a measure of our ability to get by without God's grace. It sees the law as an occasion for us to judge others and, so, excuse ourselves. More, sin seizes the law as a chance to enflame our cravings. Because desire loves a vacuum—because we naturally want what we don't have—sin seizes the law's prohibitions as an opportunity to incite more sin.**

**When the law shows up as a deprivation rather than a gift, it works crosswise to its intended purpose. It provokes what it was meant to forbid. And then, divided against ourselves, we feel powerless to change. We feel dead.**

**By raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrates his unwavering fidelity to life and breaks the chains that bind us. God's commitment to making things right is unconditional. He hasn't held anything back, not even his Son. All the grace that sin tried to conceal and suppress by hijacking God's law is once again on full display in the resurrected Jesus. The love that sin tried to dam flows unimpeded in the body of Christ. Jesus returns us to life by revealing the truth about the law. He reveals that the law is itself a grace and that only grace can fulfill it. This new life in Christ crosses all the old boundary lines. God's grace is offered freely to both insiders and outsiders. Anyone willing to meet God's promised grace with faith and trust of their own will find guilt, fear, and anger washed away. Without waiting for us to make the first move, God's grace is already working to gather and seal the whole human family as joint-heirs with Christ."**

**Miller, Adam S.; Grace Is Not God's Backup Plan: An Urgent Paraphrase of Paul's Letter to the Romans (pp. 1-5). Kindle Edition.**

## Saved By Grace

By Kevin Cauley

Categories: [Sermon Outlines](#), [Textual Sermon Outlines](#)

Scripture ref: [Ephesians 2:8-10](#)

**SUBJECT:** Salvation

**TITLE:** Saved by Grace

**PROPOSITION:** In this lesson we will discuss [Ephesians 2:8-10](#). We will note: 1) The source of salvation. 2) The substance of salvation. 3) The selflessness of salvation. 4) The state of salvation.

**OBJECTIVES:** Each person should be able to discuss the meaning of [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) with supporting scriptures.

**AIM:** To educate the brethren regarding [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) so that they can discuss it with others.

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Read: [Ephesians 2:8-10](#) *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."*
2. About the Text:
  - 1) Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus.
  - 2) His purpose in writing is to show the glory of God through the church ([Ephesians 3:21](#) *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*
  - 3) He emphasizes that those who are in the church have been brought out of bondage to sin. ([Eph. 2:1-3](#)).



- 4) God did this by 1) having mercy upon us, 2) loving us, and 3) making us alive with Christ. (Eph. 2:4, 5).
  - 5) Paul then says regarding this process, "By grace ye are saved."
  - 6) This leads us into our text.
3. Ref. to S, T, P, O, and A.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

#### **I. THE SOURCE OF SALVATION. "FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED... IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD."**

1. It originated from the Father. John 3:16
2. It came through the Christ. Romans 5:15-18
3. It was revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. Titus 2:11, 12. *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;"*

#### **II. THE SUBSTANCE OF SALVATION. "...THROUGH FAITH..."**

1. Hebrews 11:1 - substance. Faith is where the rubber meets the road.
2. It has been said that grace is God's part of salvation, and that faith is man's part of salvation.
3. Faith picks up where the Holy Spirit left off in revealing the word. Rom. 10:17
4. Faith must then TRUST God's word. Romans 10:14. *"How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"*

5. Faith must then ACT upon God's word. **Romans 10:13** *"For whosoever calls upon the name..."; Acts 22:16.*
6. When faith and action are combined, we will not have a dead faith. **James 2:26** *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

**III. THE SELFLESSNESS OF SALVATION. "AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES... NOT OF WORKS THAT NO MAN SHOULD GLORY."**

1. The way is not in ourselves. **Jeremiah 10:23** *"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."*
2. When we submit to God's grace through faith, we cannot say that we accomplished this ourselves.
3. It is not of our own accomplishment/invention. **1 Corinthians 1:27-29**
4. It is not of our own righteousness.
  - 1) **Isaiah 64:6** *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."*
  - 2) **Romans 10:1-4.**
5. It is not of our own merit. **Luke 17:10** *"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."*
6. The glory, therefore, is all to God. **1 Corinthians 1:30, 31.**

**IV. THE STATE OF SALVATION. "FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS UNTO GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD HATH BEFORE ORDAINED THAT WE SHOULD WALK IN THEM"**

1. We are the clay and he is the potter. **Jeremiah 18:6** *"O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."*
2. We are the branches and he is the vine. **John 15:1ff** (read)
3. We are the vessel and he provides the contents. **2 Cor. 4:7** *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."*
4. God molds and shapes us through His word.
  - 1) **Matthew 4:4** says, *"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*
  - 2) **John 6:63** *"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."*
  - 3) **John 8:31, 32** *"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

**CONCLUSION:**

- 1) The source of salvation. - God's grace.
- 2) The substance of salvation. - Our faith.
- 3) The selflessness of salvation - not of our own merit.
- 4) The state of salvation - we are his workmanship.

## God's Marvelous Grace

By [Mike Riley](#)

Regarding God's marvelous grace, the apostle Paul declared in [Titus 2:11](#): "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Grace is often defined as "unmerited favor" or a "free gift." It has more specific application to the gift of salvation which God gives to men. It can have a generic application to other areas, i.e., God's gift of making the sun to shine, the rain to fall, providing our food, etc. (cf. [Matthew 5:45](#)). Let us contemplate God's gift of salvation for a few moments. Any gift that is offered and received has four elements, and each of these is biblically important:

### 1) There Must Be A Gift

The gift in which we are interested is that of salvation. David wrote: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions" ([Psalm 51:1](#)). Paul said, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men" ([Titus 2:11](#)). God's grace brings salvation, which is manifested in two ways:

**(a) Salvation from past sins** – Jesus stated: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" ([Mark 16:16](#)). In this statement, the Lord referred to salvation from one's past sins.

**(b) Salvation in Heaven or eternal life** – Peter wrote to Christians about "receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" ([1 Peter 1:9](#)). Our salvation comes by means of the blood of Christ shed in His death on the cross, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" ([Hebrews 2:9](#); cf. [Romans 5:9-10](#); [Ephesians 1:7](#); [1 John 1:7](#)).

## **2) There Must Be A Giver**

If there is a gift, there must be a giver. “Grace” is the Bible term for that which God (the Giver) gave through Christ. God is the source of our salvation, and for this reason, “grace of God” is found twenty-four times in the New Testament. Paul exulted: “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” ([2 Corinthians 9:15](#)). There is no other source of salvation. Therefore, we cannot save ourselves (either by good works or by our moral behavior). We must have God’s grace to be saved.

## **3) There Must Be A Receiver**

A third necessary component of a gift that is accepted is a receiver. Mankind is the recipient of the marvelous grace of God. God has done for man what man could not do for himself. On his own, man could not find the right way ([Proverbs 14:12](#); [Isaiah 53:6](#); [Jeremiah 10:23](#)). A human being, when he reaches the time in his life where he can discern right and wrong ([Isaiah 7:15](#)), commits sin ([Romans 3:23](#); [Gal. 3:22](#)), and thus deserves death ([Romans 6:23](#); [James 1:15](#)). Man could not and cannot devise a way to save himself or earn his salvation, as Paul clearly states in [2 Timothy 1:9](#): “Who [God] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” In [Ephesians 2:8-9](#), he also indicated that man cannot earn his salvation. Man must rely upon God and His grace to be saved: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

## **4) The Giver May Impose Conditions**

The giver may impose conditions relating to reception of the gift. This is not a necessity; the giver may give a gift without any conditions. To impose or not to impose conditions is entirely at the discretion of the giver. Whether or not the giver imposes conditions relating to his gift, it is no less a gift – and unmerited – in either case. God has placed conditions upon our reception of His “gift” of salvation.

God says that upon “hearing” His Word we must “believe” in Jesus as His Son ([John 8:24](#); [John 14:1](#); [Romans 10:17](#)). When we believe, we must, upon that belief, “repent” of our sins ([Luke 13:3](#); [Luke 24:46-47](#); [Acts 17:30](#)).

A faith not worth confessing is not worth possessing, thus we must “confess” our faith in Jesus as God’s Son ([Romans 10:10](#); [Acts 8:37](#)). Then we must be “baptized” (immersed) in water for the forgiveness of our sins ([Mark 16:16](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Acts 22:16](#)). While baptism saves us from our past sins ([1 Peter 3:21](#)), we must, to be eternally saved in Heaven, live faithfully until death ([Matthew 10:22](#); [1 Corinthians 15:58](#)).

## **Conclusion**

God’s marvelous grace is available to all men everywhere ([Titus 2:11](#)); however, only those who meet the conditions which God has attached to this “gift” will receive this most important and precious of all gifts.

## Some Aspects Of God's Grace

By [Mike Riley](#)

Categories: [Church of Christ Bulletin Articles](#)

[Titus 2:11-14](#) states:

*"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live [soberly](#), righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works."*

According to the above text:

**1) God's grace "has appeared to all men"** — Since God is no respecter of persons, salvation is offered to both Jew and Gentile ([Acts 10:34-35](#); [Romans 1:16](#); [Gal. 3:26-29](#)).

**2) God's grace "teaches" us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts"** — Our old sinful life must be rooted out and our selfish attachments to this world must be replaced by spiritual goals ([Colossians 3:1-2](#)). God does not "take away" our inclination to sin; but by His grace, he teaches us to deny the entrance of sin into our life ([Matthew 16:24](#); cf. [Psalm 119:11](#); [Romans 6:6-14](#); [Colossians 3:5-11](#)).

**3) We are to "live soberly, righteously, and godly"** — Our lifestyle should reflect the positive teaching of God's grace.

**4) We are to look for "that blessed hope"** — Our Lord, whose appearing signals the end of our sojourn here and our reception into the heavenly home ([Titus 2:13](#); cf. [John 14:1-6](#)). Hope (made possible by God's grace) is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast ([Hebrews 6:19](#)). It sustains us in time of trial.

**5) “Who gave Himself for us”** — The purchase price being the only price by which man could be justified in God’s sight ([Romans 5:6-10](#); [Ephesians 1:5-7](#)).

To what end did our Lord “redeem us from every lawless deed?”

**6) To “purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works”** — a peculiar people, a special kind of people, a people especially shaped and molded to be God’s own possession ([1 Peter 2:9](#); cf. [Deuteronomy 14:2](#); [1 Chronicles 17:22](#) ). God’s special people should be zealous of performing God-ordained good works, as God has every right to expect ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).



## Sermon on God's Grace | The Biblical Picture of Grace

By [Kevin Cauley](#)

Categories: [Sermon Outlines](#), [Topical Sermon Outlines](#)

**Sermon on God's Grace** - Kevin Cauley writes that the Biblical picture of God's grace shows us its 1) Definition, 2) Direction, 3) Duty, and 4) Determination.

**SUBJECT:** Salvation

**TITLE:** Grace

**PROPOSITION:** The Biblical picture of Grace shows us its 1) Definition, 2) Direction, 3) Duty, and 4) Determination.

**OBJECTIVES:** Everyone should be able to explain the meaning of grace and how that implies that we do not earn our salvation.

**AIM:** To encourage the brethren through the study of grace.

**INTRODUCTION:** [ Beginning of this sermon on God's grace. ]

1. Read: [Ephesians 2:8](#)
2. About the Text:
  - 1) All have at one time been alienated from God.
  - 2) It is through God's grace that it is possible for us to return to him.
3. Ref. to S, T, P, O, and A.

**DISCUSSION:** The Biblical picture of Grace shows us its...

### I. THE DEFINITION OF GRACE—IT IS UNMERITED FAVOR

1. [Ephesians 2:1ff](#)

2. Romans 5:12ff
3. 2 Corinthians 8:9

## II. THE DIRECTION OF GOD'S GRACE—IT COMES FROM GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

1. John 1:17
2. 1 Corinthians 1:4 "I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;"
3. Ephesians 2:7 "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

## III. THE DUTY OF GRACE—TO MAKE SALVATION POSSIBLE

1. Acts 15:11 "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."
2. Romans 3:24 "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:"
3. Titus 2:11-12

## IV. THE DETERMINATION OF GRACE—OUR SALVATION IS NOT EARNED

1. Romans 4:4-5
2. Ephesians 2:8 "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"
3. Titus 3:3-7

**CONCLUSION:**In this sermon on God's grace..

1. Let us remember the..
  - 1) Definition of Grace.
  - 2) Direction of Grace
  - 3) Duty of Grace
  - 4) Determination of Grace

## Sermon on John 3:16 – God's Grace as Shown by John 3:16

By [Kevin Cauley](#)

Categories: [Sermon Outlines](#), [Textual Sermon Outlines](#)

Tags: [Sermons on John 3:16](#)

**Sermon on John 3:16.** A textual study of [John 3:16](#) noticing God's grace as it reveals itself through his motivation, method, message, and mission.

**SUBJECT:** Theology: Soteriology

**TITLE:** God's Grace as Shown by John 3:16

**PROPOSITION:** In this lesson we will do a textual study of [John 3:16](#) noticing God's grace as it reveals itself through his motivation, method, message, and mission.

**OBJECTIVES:** The hearer should be able to understand fully [John 3:16](#) and show how God's grace relates to man's obedience.

**AIM:** In this lesson I hope to communicate that [God's grace](#) is not devoid of our obedience and that grace is actually the entire scope of the [plan of salvation](#).

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. Read: [John 3:16](#)
2. About the Text:
  - 1) Nicodemus had come to Jesus by night.
  - 2) Jesus told Nicodemus what he had to do to be saved. "Except ye are born of the water and spirit..." 3:5
  - 3) There was a further question which Jesus answered in this way: "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" 3:12

- 4) Evidently, Nicodemus had some questions about heavenly things, but all that was on our Lord's mind was the plan for man's salvation.
  - 5) Jesus says, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven. . ." (John 3:13-21).
  - 6) The focus of this passage is verse 16 which will be our study tonight.
3. Ref. to S, T, P, O, and A.

**DISCUSSION:** John 3:16 reveals to us in the plan of salvation God's...

**I. MOTIVATION-LOVE. (FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD) .**

1. Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth his love toward us..."
2. Romans 8:35-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ..."
3. 1 John 4:7-10 "Beloved, let us love one another..."
4. Ephesians 2:4-10 "But God, who is rich in mercy..."

**II. METHOD-HIS SON (THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON) .**

1. He is the Son of God "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him..." Matthew 1:20-23
2. He came to serve-"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Philippians 2:5-11)
3. He came to bring salvation through his death-Hebrews 9:11-15 "But Christ being come an high priest..."

**III. MESSAGE-BELIEVE (THAT WHOSOEVER WOULD BELIEVE ON HIM) .**

1. God wants us to have a life of faith-Hebrews 11:6 "For without faith..."

2. More than this he wants us to believe in his Son Jesus—[John 20:30-31](#) "Many other signs. . ."
3. [John 1:7-12](#) "The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light...:"
4. [John 4:42](#) "And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."
5. [John 8:24](#) " I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."

#### **IV. MISSION—ETERNAL SALVATION FOR ALL (SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE).**

1. [John 10:27-28](#) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."
2. [Matthew 25:46](#) "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal."
3. [John 6:68-69](#) "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."
4. [John 17:1-3](#) "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

## “His Grace Reaches Me”

By [Mike Riley](#)

Categories: [Church of Christ Bulletin Articles](#)

Paul once reminded Titus that the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men ([Titus 2:11](#) – NKJV). Due to mankind’s deliberate act of transgression ([Genesis 3:1-6](#) – NKJV; [Romans 5:12-17](#) – NKJV; [1 John 3:4](#) – NKJV) he separated himself from the love and protection of God ([Isaiah 59:1-2](#) – NKJV; [Ephesians 2:1](#) – NKJV). Those folks who choose to break the commandments of the Lord, destroy the beautiful relationship they once enjoyed with the Creator.

However, God has so loved mankind as to make a way for him to return to His Creator ([Hosea 14:1-4](#) – NKJV; [John 3:16-17](#) – NKJV; [Romans 5:8](#) – NKJV). The New Testament writers utilized the word grace to describe God’s intense love for mankind – His crowning creation.

Grace is defined as God’s favor which mankind in and of himself does not deserve. However, God’s grace must be appropriated by man through **acts of faith** ([Romans 4:1-8](#) – NKJV; [Hebrews 11:8](#) – NKJV; [Hebrews 11:17-19](#) – NKJV; [James 2:21-24](#) – NKJV).

Titus was reminded that God’s grace had indeed appeared to all men in the form of the preaching of the gospel of Christ ([Titus 1:3](#) – NKJV; [Titus 1:11-14](#) – NKJV). Luke recorded Paul as saying that he testified to the gospel of the grace of God. ([Acts 20:24](#) – NKJV). Therefore we can know for sure that where the gospel has gone, so has the grace of God gone also. It is certainly true that the Grace of God has forever been manifested for all at Calvary, but the crucifixion will do no good to the one who has no faith in the crucified One ([John 8:24](#) – NKJV; [Acts 2:21](#) – NKJV; [Romans 10:17](#) – NKJV).

Yes, “His grace reaches me” — and not only me, but it reaches to all who will gladly receive His word and be obedient to it ([Acts 2:38-41](#) – NKJV; [Acts 10:34-43](#) – NKJV; [Acts 10:48](#) – NKJV; [Acts 11:14](#) – NKJV; [Hebrews 5:8-9](#) – NKJV).

The Grace of God is not like a sword, forcing men to be saved — rather, it's similar to a clear flowing fountain of pure, and refreshing water that earnestly bids all to come and drink freely ([Revelation 22:17](#) – NKJV)

*Deeper than the ocean and wider than the sea,  
Is the grace of the Savior for sinners like me;  
Sent from the Father, and it thrills my soul,  
Just to feel and to know,  
That His blood makes me whole.  
His grace reaches me,  
yes, His grace reaches me,  
And 'twill last thru eternity;  
Now I'm under His control  
and I'm happy in my soul,  
Just to know that His grace reaches me. —Whitney Gleason*

*The Spiritual Sword Vol. 17 #4*  
*Special Issue@Amazing Grace*

**Harmony of Romans 11:6 & James 2:24**

**“James emphasizes that a right standing with God depends on a faith that is obedient to the will of God. Grace is still involved, because for God to reveal His will to us is itself an expression of divine grace. We would again distort the truth an expression of divine grace.**

**We would again distort the truth if we suggested that salvation could be obtained in the absence of any human action. Salvation is not by faith alone!**

– Rusty Peterman



*The Spiritual Sword Vol. 17 #4*  
*Special Issue@Amazing Grace*

**God's Grace: Mar's Hill Speech**

“Paul made it clear that of one blood the Creator made us all (Acts 17:26). Each one shall give account unto God for the deeds done in his own body (Romans 14: 12). The grace of the Lord has appeared unto all (Titus 2: 11) and, therefore, the universal nature of Judgment Day is chronicled in this graphic speech.” – John Ramsey

## Transactional to Transcendent Religion: Internalized Belief & Behavioral System

| Areopagites' Assumptions            | Acts 17 | Apostle's Assumptions        |
|-------------------------------------|---------|------------------------------|
| <i>Being Religious Is Enough</i>    | : 22    | This Is Totally Insufficient |
| <i>God Unknowable By Men</i>        | : 23    | Our God Is Very Knowable     |
| <i>God In Temples Domestic</i>      | : 24    | God Created The Cosmos       |
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| <i>Ignorance Excuse For Sin</i>     | : 30    | God Not Now Winking At       |
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# GRACE A PERSON: JESUS CHRIST

## IS GRACE A PERSON?

**O**FTEN WHEN GIVING a definition of grace, modern teachers will say grace is a *person* rather than a *noun* and the name of that person is Jesus. It's a very catchy saying, but is it true? Grace certainly came through a person, but is grace itself a person? Jesus was filled with grace and truth. He was the embodiment of God's grace. He was grace in action, dying to pay for our sins, rising from the dead to justify us, sending His Spirit to empower us, and always interceding for us in heaven. But grace is not Jesus. Grace is a noun, brought to us by a person whose name is Jesus. He brings grace to us and demonstrates grace to us. But in the Bible grace is not a person but a noun – a wonderful, glorious noun.

Let's look at some relevant verses that make this perfectly clear.

- “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). So, we see that Jesus is full of grace and truth but is not grace Himself.
- “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [the Jews] shall be saved, even as they [the Gentiles]” (Acts 15:11). Here Peter speaks of the grace of the Lord Jesus, which would make no sense at all if grace is a person and His name is Jesus.

Paul also speaks of “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), which makes no sense if grace is a person and not a noun. Of course, the message of God's grace is *all about Jesus*, but that is very different from saying that grace *is* Jesus.

Could it be that some people who say, “Grace is a person, and His name is Jesus,” are avoiding giving a clear definition of grace? Really now, when you ask someone to define grace and you're given an answer like this, what has the person actually told you? Every true Christian believes in Jesus and loves and follows Him, so when teachers define grace by saying, “It's a person named Jesus,” they haven't told us anything at all. What exactly do they mean?

Let's look at some more verses that speak about God's amazing grace.

Paul wrote, “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if through the trespass of one man many died, then how much more has the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many” (Rom. 5:15). Paul again speaks of the grace of God and then the grace of that one man Jesus Christ, which is very different than saying grace is a person.

In keeping with that, Paul speaks of “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” five times in his letters (Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 8:9; Gal. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18). If grace is a person and His name is Jesus, what would these verses mean? Would Paul be speaking about the Jesus of our Lord Jesus Christ?

In Romans Paul wrote, “To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:7). Notice that peace and grace come *from* the Father and the Son, but neither peace nor grace *are* the Father and Son. See also his greeting to the Corinthians: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3).

So, I think it should be pretty clear by now that grace is a noun, not a person. But, to repeat, it is a glorious noun, and it is all about Jesus, so let’s focus on the grace that comes to us through Him.

### MORE THAN UNMERITED FAVOR

Almost twenty-five years ago I did a serious study of the concept of grace in the Bible. I opened up my Hebrew and Greek concordances and examined every reference where the key words for “grace” occurred. Then I arranged them in different categories and prayerfully analyzed the usage. I was amazed by what I found, especially in the New Testament!

You see, grace is more than “unmerited favor” (although unmerited favor is nothing to snivel at). It is more than God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense (although that acronym sums up everything we will ever have or experience in God). God’s grace is more than just a word or a concept, more than the manner in which God deals with us (as in, “I’m saved by grace, and everything I do is by grace”). It’s more than that. It is His merciful, enabling help, His ongoing empowerment, His continued working on our behalf. It speaks of the Lord’s past, present, and future action, expressing what Jesus *does* for us and not just what He *did* for us. As expressed by A. M. Hunter, “Grace means primarily the free, forgiving love of God in Christ to sinners and the operation of that love in the lives of Christians.”<sup>1</sup>

Let me take a few minutes and explain this to you. Are you ready to do some study?

We’ll begin with verses in which “grace” (*charis* in the Greek, which sounds like *car* plus *iss* in English) does mean unmerited favor. Here are some clear examples:

But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. [In context, salvation by grace is being contrasted with salvation by works.]

—ACTS 15:11

Therefore, the promise comes through faith, so that it might be by grace.

—ROMANS 4:16

I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died in vain.

—GALATIANS 2:21

In each of these verses you could substitute “unmerited favor” for “grace,” and the meaning would be the same. So, we can see that we’re on solid footing here.

It was this emphasis on grace that became a foundation of the gospel message. (See John 1:17, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”) So, the message became known as the gospel of grace, as the following verses attest:

So, Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to perform signs and wonders.

—ACTS 14:3, NIV

Nor do I count my life of value to myself, so that I may joyfully finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

—ACTS 20:24; SEE ALSO ACTS 20:32

How glorious is this gospel of grace! As filthy as we were, as undeserving as we were, as damnable and ungrateful as we were, Jesus died for us. The Father set His love on us—even though we were rank rebels—and adopted us as His very own sons and daughters, actually making us *joint heirs* of the universe with His Son. Hallelujah! This is the most wonderful news that a mortal ear could ever hear, and it expresses a goodness beyond human comprehension. We had huge, eternal debts that were damning our souls. Jesus, who owed us nothing, paid them all. That’s why Paul could write that we are “justified freely by His grace” (Rom 3:24). God can pronounce us “not guilty” because of what His own Son did.

This is the foundation of our spiritual lives, and it is the anchor for our souls. The moment we put our trust in Him as Lord and Savior, our spiritual account was adjusted, and the Father looked at us and said, “Not guilty!” What’s more, He said, “You are now righteous.” And what’s more than that, He said, “You are now My beloved child.” That is the grace of God—from the prison of sin to the palace of the Savior, from a child of the devil to a child of the King, all because of the blood of Jesus.

## GRACE EMPOWERS

But here is the surprising news: the New Testament word *grace* does *not* fundamentally mean “unmerited favor.” Its basic meaning does include favor (of any kind) along with kindness, but it also includes enablement and gifting, important concepts we often miss.

You see, God’s grace not only *did* something amazing for us—forgiving us for all our sins—but His grace *continues to do* something amazing for us—empowering us to live for Him. In fact, there was nothing revolutionary in the New Testament concept of grace meaning “favor” or “gift.” What was revolutionary was the degree of favor shown to us through the Cross and the ongoing effectiveness of that favor in our lives. Grace finishes what it starts.

Do you see the difference? It’s one thing to say, “I come to God through His grace,” meaning I have access to God through the blood of His Son (amen to that!). It’s another thing to say, “I serve God daily through His grace,” meaning I am enabled to do His will because He Himself is at work in me. There is a distinction here.

God's grace is comprehensive and complete. It saves and sanctifies, rescues and restores, transforming us from hell-bound sinners to holy-living saints. That's the grace of God! And just as it was the Lord's supernatural, infinite grace that saved us, it is His supernatural, infinite grace that keeps us. It is truly an ocean of grace that we experience in Jesus.

Look back and see how the Lord began to deal with you. It was all grace! You were a hopeless slave to sin, a rejected wretch, a captive to the will of the flesh. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace [*charis*] you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4–5, NIV). Who can fathom God's grace?

But that is only the beginning. His grace is with us this very hour, helping us, keeping us, empowering us. That's why we can "come with confidence to the throne of grace [*charis*], that we may obtain mercy and find grace [*charis*] to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). What encouraging words! For His children, God's throne is a place of help, mercy, and favor, and at that throne we find everything we need. Praise God for the stream of grace that flows from the throne of grace.

And yet there is more. We can also look ahead to future grace: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace [*charis*], expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6–7, NIV). In light of this—who can imagine what it will be like?—Peter urges us, "Set your hope fully on the grace [*charis*] that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13, ESV). What a day that will be! Grace, more grace, and endless grace—that sums up our past, present, and future in Jesus. Do you realize what this means?

It means we can rest confidently in the goodness of our God, knowing that the same blood that washed us in the beginning continues to wash us in this hour, and that the same grace that helped us in the past continues to help us in the present. God favored us by setting His love on us, and He favors us by keeping His love on us.

How were we saved? By grace through faith. How are we kept? By grace through faith. What is our eternal hope? Grace through faith. Revel in it; rejoice in it; delight in it; dive into it. The Lord is our strength; the Lord is our support; the Lord is our sustainer; the Lord is our Savior. Yes, salvation is *of* the Lord, *through* the Lord, *by* the Lord, and *from* the Lord. From beginning to end it's all grace.

It's only understandable, then, that a glorious concept like this could be abused. Even the New Testament writers dealt with this abuse several times, with Paul giving an emphatic no to two theoretical questions about grace from the Romans. (See Romans 6, where Paul responds to the questions: "Should we sin more, so that there will more grace?" and, "Are we now free to sin, since we're not under the law but under grace?")

Jude also dealt with the abuse of grace, writing, "I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ" (Jude 1:4, NLT).

So, it's clear that grace can be abused, and the best way to avoid the abuse of grace is to get to know biblical grace—God's grace—intimately for ourselves. The more we know the authentic, the better equipped we will be to avoid the exaggerated and counterfeit.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Brown, M. L. (2016). [\*The grace controversy: answers to 12 common questions\*](#). Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.

*Are you, Salieri, envious because I am so generous to Mozart? Are you, Saul, envious because I am so generous to David? Are you Pharisees envious because I open the gate to Gentiles so late in the game? That I honor the prayer of a tax collector above a Pharisee's, that I accept a thief's last-minute confession and welcome him to Paradise—does this arouse your envy? Do you begrudge my leaving the obedient flock to seek the stray or my serving a fatted calf to the no-good prodigal?*

The employer in Jesus' story did not cheat the full-day workers by paying everyone for one hour's work instead of twelve. No, the full-day workers got what they were promised. Their discontent arose from the scandalous mathematics of grace. They could not accept that their employer had the right to do what he wanted with his money when it meant paying scoundrels twelve times what they deserved.

Significantly, many Christians who study this parable identify with the employees who put in a full day's work, rather than the add-ons at the end of the day. We like to think of ourselves as responsible workers, and the employer's strange behavior baffles us as it did the original hearers. We risk missing the story's point: that God dispenses gifts, not wages. None of us gets paid according to merit, for none of us comes close to satisfying God's requirements for a perfect life. If paid on the basis of fairness, we would all end up in hell.

In the words of Robert Farrar Capon, "If the world could have been saved by good bookkeeping, it would have been saved by Moses, not Jesus." Grace cannot be reduced to generally accepted accounting principles. In the bottom-line realm of ungrace, some workers deserve more than others; in the realm of grace the word *deserve* does not even apply.

Frederick Buechner says,

People are prepared for everything except for the fact that beyond the darkness of their blindness there is a great light. They are prepared to go on breaking their backs plowing the same old field until the cows come home without seeing, until they stub their toes on it, that there is a treasure buried in that field rich enough to buy Texas. They are prepared for a God who strikes hard bargains but not for a God who gives as much for an hour's work as for a day's. They are prepared for a mustard-seed kingdom of God no bigger than the eye of a newt but not for the great banyan it becomes with birds in its branches singing Mozart. They are prepared for the potluck supper at First Presbyterian but not for the marriage supper of the lamb....

**B**y my reckoning Judas and Peter stand out as the most **mathematical** of the disciples. Judas must have shown some facility with numbers or the others would not have elected him treasurer. Peter was a stickler for detail, always trying to pin down Jesus' precise meaning. Also, the Gospels record that when Jesus engineered a miraculous catch of fish, Peter hauled in 153 big ones. *Who but a mathematician would have bothered to count the squirming pile?*

It was altogether in character, then, for the scrupulous apostle Peter to pursue some mathematical formula of grace. "How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" he asked Jesus. "Up to seven times?" Peter was erring on the side of



magnanimity, for the rabbis in his day had suggested three as the maximum number of times one might be expected to forgive.

“Not seven times, but seventy-seven times,” replied Jesus in a flash. Some manuscripts have “seventy times seven,” but it hardly matters whether Jesus said 77 or 490: forgiveness, he implied, is not the kind of thing you count on an abacus.

Peter’s question prompted another of Jesus’ trenchant stories, about a servant who has somehow piled up a debt of several million dollars. The fact that realistically no servant could accumulate a debt so huge underscores Jesus’ point: confiscating the man’s family, children, and all his property would not make a dent in repaying the debt. It is unforgivable. Nevertheless, the king, touched with pity, abruptly cancels the debt and lets the servant off scot-free.

Suddenly, the plot twists. The servant who has just been forgiven seizes a colleague who owes him a few dollars and begins to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” he demands, and throws the man into jail. In a word, the greedy servant is an *ingrate*.

Why Jesus draws the parable with such exaggerated strokes comes clear when he reveals that the king represents God. This above all should determine our attitude toward others: a humble awareness that God has already forgiven us a debt so mountainous that beside it any person’s wrongs against us shrink to the size of anthills. How can we *not* forgive each other in light of all God has forgiven us?

As C. S. Lewis put it, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” The more I reflect on Jesus’ parables, the more tempted I am to reclaim the word “atrocious” to describe the mathematics of the gospel. I believe Jesus gave us these stories about grace in order to call us to step completely outside our tit-for-tat world of ungrace and enter into God’s realm of infinite grace. As Miroslav Volf puts it, “the economy of undeserved grace has primacy over the economy of moral deserts.”

From nursery school onward we are taught how to succeed in the world of ungrace. The early bird gets the worm. No pain, no gain. There is no such thing as a free lunch. Demand your rights. Get what you pay for. I know these rules well because I live by them. I work for what I earn; I like to win; I insist on my rights. I want people to get what they deserve—nothing more, nothing less.

Yet if I care to listen, I hear a loud whisper from the gospel that I did not get what I deserved. I deserved punishment and got forgiveness. I deserved wrath and got love. I deserved debtor’s prison and got instead a clean credit history. I deserved stern lectures and crawl-on-your-knees repentance; I got a banquet—Babette’s feast—spread for me.

**I**n a manner of speaking, grace solves a dilemma for God. You do not have to read far in the Bible to detect an underlying tension in how God feels about humanity. On the one hand, God loves us; on the other hand, our behavior repulses him. God yearns to see in people something of his own image reflected; at best he sees shattered fragments of that image. Still, God cannot—or will not—give up.

A passage from Isaiah is often cited as proof of God's remoteness and power:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the LORD.

"As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts."

In context, though, God is actually describing his eagerness to forgive. The same God who created the heavens and the earth has the power to bridge the great chasm that separates him from his creatures. He will reconcile, he will forgive, no matter what obstacles his prodigal children put in the way. As the prophet Micah says, "You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy."

Sometimes God's conflicting emotions tug against each other in the very same scene. In the book of Hosea, for example, God wavers between tender reminiscences of his people and solemn threats of judgment. "Swords will flash in their cities," he warns darkly, and then almost in midsentence a cry of love escapes:

How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel? ...  
My heart is changed within me;  
all my compassion is aroused.

"I will not carry out my fierce anger," God concludes at last. "For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you." Once again God reserves the right to alter the rules of retribution. Although Israel has fully earned his rebuff, they will not get what they deserve. *I am God, and not man.... Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money?* God will go to any preposterous length to get his family back.

In an astonishing acted-out parable, God asks the prophet Hosea to marry a woman named Gomer in order to illustrate his love for Israel. Gomer bears three children for Hosea, then abandons the family to live with another man. For a time she works as a prostitute, and it is during this period that God gives the shocking command to Hosea, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods...."

In Hosea, the scandal of grace became an actual, talk-of-the-town scandal. What goes through a man's mind when his wife treats him as Gomer treated Hosea? He wanted to kill her, he wanted to forgive her. He wanted divorce, he wanted reconciliation. She shamed him, she melted him. Absurdly, against all odds, the irresistible power of love won out. Hosea the cuckold, joke of the community, welcomed his wife back home.

Gomer did not get fairness, or even justice; she got grace. Every time I read their story—or read God’s speeches that begin with sternness and dissolve into tears—I marvel at a God who allows himself to endure such humiliation only to come back for more. “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?” Substitute your own name for Ephraim and Israel. At the heart of the gospel is a God who deliberately surrenders to the wild, irresistible power of love.

Centuries later an apostle would explain God’s response in more analytical terms: “But where sin increased, grace increased all the more.” Paul knew better than anyone who has ever lived that grace comes undeserved, at God’s initiative and not our own. Knocked flat on the ground on the way to Damascus, he never recovered from the impact of grace: the word appears no later than the second sentence in every one of his letters. As Frederick Buechner says, “Grace is the best he can wish them because grace is the best he himself ever received.”

Paul harped on grace because he knew what could happen if we believe we have earned God’s love. In the dark times, if perhaps we badly fail God, or if for no good reason we simply feel unloved, we would stand on shaky ground. We would fear that God might stop loving us when he discovers the real truth about us. Paul—“the chief of sinners” he once called himself—knew beyond doubt that **God loves people because of who God is, not because of who we are.**

Aware of the apparent scandal of grace, Paul took pains to explain how God has made peace with human beings. Grace baffles us because it goes against the intuition everyone has that, in the face of injustice, some price must be paid. A murderer cannot simply go free. A child abuser cannot shrug and say, “I just felt like it.” Anticipating these objections, Paul stressed that a price has been paid—by God himself. God gave up his own Son rather than give up on humanity.

Like Babette’s feast, **grace costs nothing for the recipients but everything for the giver.** God’s grace is not a grandfatherly display of “niceness,” for it cost the exorbitant price of Calvary. “There is only one real law—the law of the universe,” said Dorothy Sayers. “It may be fulfilled either by way of judgment or by the way of grace, but it *must* be fulfilled one way or the other.” By accepting the judgment in his own body, Jesus fulfilled that law, and God found a way to forgive.

In the movie *The Last Emperor*, the young child anointed as the last emperor of China lives a magical life of luxury with a thousand eunuch servants at his command. “What happens when you do wrong?” his brother asks. “When I do wrong, someone else is punished,” the boy emperor replies. To demonstrate, he breaks a jar, and one of the servants is beaten. In Christian theology, Jesus reversed that ancient pattern: when the servants erred, the King was punished. **Grace is free only because the giver himself has borne the cost.**<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## Man's Plight Without God

*Jerry Fite*

“FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH” (Romans 6:23). The deadly consequences of sin should alarm all men, for all have sinned. The results of sin may be observed with the eye or perceived with the heart. They will always affect man spiritually, and sometimes even physically. Sin's bitter fruit may be tasted in time, but most certainly in eternity. Sin has its season of pleasure, but always returns for just payment. Man always pays dearly: He exists separated from God (Isaiah 59:2).

Until one knows his condition without God, he cannot properly appreciate God's grace. The extension of grace implies need. As long as man feels self-sufficient, he has no need. But let him begin listening to the commentary of God upon man's sins. Let him start paying attention to the symptoms of emptiness that self-indulgence fails to fill. Then, grace will begin to glisten as never before.

Sin cannot appear without arousing God's judicial wrath. Because God is holy, He must punish sin. So when man sins, his relationship with God is one of enmity (Romans 5:8, 10). No penitence nor renewed promise can change the fact that sin has occurred. Yet, after “missing the mark,” what more can man offer God? Bondage in sin becomes his wretched fate (Romans 7:14, 24). God cannot overlook sin. He must be just. Man cannot plead innocence. He must have mercy.

When Jesus looked at men, He saw darkness, sickness, and death. These folks had the ability to see (Matthew 4:16). They possessed good appetites, and were physically active (Mark 2:15–17; Luke 9:62). But they were lost in sin. No greater picture of man's helplessness could be drawn. For we never expect life to spring from a corpse, health to emanate from a disease, or light to issue from darkness. God wants us to know that we still need deliverance from above though we may be functioning well according to worldly standards.

Man can choose to live without God. He begins by eliminating God from his thinking and enthrones himself. Instead of a God-centered life, he possesses a Self-centered life. The result is never pretty. Obeying the mandates of his lust, he soon “waxeth corrupt” (Ephesians 4:22). His ways may be in step with the age, but he fails to perceive that Satan has inspired their direction (Ephesians 2:2). Man may become more sophisticated without God, but never better.

Without God, man's reasoning becomes so dark that God gives him up to experience the degrading consequences (Romans 1:26–32). Sexual perversion becomes worse until the worldly sages can distinguish between “softcore” and “hardcore” pornography. Man soon loses “natural affection.” The worldly-wise will allow murder, if committed in abortion clinics. Making money takes precedence over creating strong families. Occasional lying finds acceptance alongside good business ethics. Man's values are twisted. His life is confused.

Living without God, man tends to finally view his life as God viewed it all along: “vain,” void of lasting good (1 Peter 1:18). He views life as “living on the perfume of an empty vase”—or “a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities.” His “good life” has become a facade hiding his crumbling hopes. Faith, hope, and love are borrowed words with empty sounds, because he has denied their true substance and power.

Such are the sad results when man plans his way without God. Man's road is paved with neglect and ingratitude. It always ends in degradation and despair. With sorrow, man can look at his road and honestly say, "I did it my way."

Helplessness and hopelessness characterize man's condition without God. But it is when he sees the vanity of man's wisdom that he longs for the grace of divine teaching. It is when he sees his true helpless condition before his Creator that he yearns for the terms of reconciliation from his merciful Judge. He follows closely behind his Deliverer, for he knows that without his gracious Savior, he is lost.

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# Five States of the Soul:

- **EXEMPTION:**
- **Ezekiel 18: 20; Matthew 18: 1 – 3**
- **CONDEMNATION:**
- **Galatians 3: 22**
- **JUSTIFICATION:**
- **Romans 5: 1, 2; 8: 1, 2**
- **DAMNATION:**
- **Matthew 23: 3; Mark 16: 16**
- **GLORIFICATION:**
- **Romans 8: 17, 30; II Thess. 1: 7 - 1**

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<sup>25</sup> Fite, J. (1984). [Man's Plight Without God](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 14.

## Christ—The Ultimate Expression of God’s Grace

David Barnes

THE WORD “ULTIMATE” IS SOMEWHAT overworked in our society. Anywhere you might care to look you will find folks attempting to provide some kind of “ultimate” expression. We have all heard of “the greatest game ever played” or “the supreme work of art.” It may be the ultimate for awhile, but before long someone will replace it with another. Religion has not been excluded from these attempts. In Micah 6:6–7, we read of human attempts to provide the ultimate sacrifice for sin. These attempts began with a calf and progressed to human sacrifice. Those sacrifices resulted in failure for two basic reasons: First, none of the sacrifices mentioned in this passage were really man’s to give. Everything on earth belongs to God. We are merely stewards entrusted with a few possessions during our lives on earth. Second, none of these sacrifices had the power to atone for sin; therefore, man has nothing to offer and, even if he did, what he gave could not remove his sin. Man alone cannot provide the ultimate sacrifice to God. He is lost in his sin and personally helpless.

God, however, knows of man’s inability to atone for his own sins. God had this knowledge from the beginning and thus planned to make provision for His creation. This knowledge of our weakness, coupled with His love for us, prompted Him to make a sacrificial gift of His only begotten Son. This magnificent display of love shows how important man is in the eyes of God. God gave Jesus, a perfect, innocent lamb, for the sins of wicked man—the innocent dying on behalf of the guilty. Here was the sacrifice that could remove the guilt of man and atone for his sin. In the giving of His Son, God provided the ultimate expression of love.

An examination of John 3:16 reveals the pertinent facts about this great gift of grace in simple, thrilling language. In this passage, Jesus claims that the *origin* of the gift is “God.” This is the God who created, revealed His will, and blessed humanity. God’s *motive* is simply “love,” a love which is of such quality and depth that we really only begin to comprehend it. Furthermore, Jesus says that “God so loved.” The word “so” indicates the *intensity* of the love. He did not merely “love,” He “so loved!” The quality of the love corresponds to the quality of the gift. We understand God’s love through Jesus Christ. The *recipient* of the great love is “the world.” The *action* God performed is seen in the word “gave.” He makes no demands of repayment and He requires no overwhelming burdens for men to bear in payment for His grace. He “gave” us a gift in the purest sense of the word. The *gift* was “His only begotten Son” and the *purpose* of the gift was “eternal life” for you and me.

God does not rejoice in the prospect of anyone perishing. His aim for man in Eden was paradise and eternal life, but man lost this by sin. He regained it in the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. In this way God becomes the Justifier of mankind through the provision of Christ.

The purpose of the gift of Christ at Calvary was the redemption of man. It is the offer of eternal life. The circumstances of our eternal life depends upon our reaction to God’s action. Throughout the whole of Scripture there are only two reactions possible—we may obey and be saved, or disobey and be lost. Jesus, then, is expounding the positive side of God’s gift in this passage.

This gift of God's Son is the focal point of all human existence. Everything that God has revealed to man relates to the gift of Christ. It is this event that gives the Old Testament purpose and the New Testament authority. This gift is the very thrust of all revelation. The sacrificial Son is the reason we sing, pray and rejoice with unspeakable joy. His gift is the reason for all commands, promises and attendant blessings that God expresses in His Word. Without it, we would still be groping—searching for an “ultimate expression” that would repair the breach in our relationship with God. We would ever be searching, never finding, and always failing. With this gift, we can express ourselves completely as we frame our lives within the supreme and final statement of God's gracious love for man. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Christ—the ultimate expression of God's grace.

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<sup>26</sup> Barnes, D. (1984). [Christ—The Ultimate Expression of God's Grace](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 15.

## JESUS: FULL OF GRACE & TRUTH

Truth and grace exist in a delicate balancing act for us—too much unrelenting truth results in judgment, bitterness, and hopeless desperation, and grace in the absence of truth leads to excuses and moral decay. Most of us wobble along, usually tilting too far one way or the other, struggling to love with both truth and grace. It's a difficult tightrope to walk. We need the measuring stick of truth to show us the reality of our circumstances and to help us appreciate and crave grace. But God knows our limitations, and He sent us a living example—Jesus, who walked with truth and grace in perfect tension. Jesus didn't merely model these principles; He *is* truth and grace. He doled out difficult truth while paying for our mistakes in blood. Our challenge is to be a living reflection of Christ by speaking truth while surrendering to God's grace and extending it to others. He calls us to love regardless of the results—just as Jesus did.

The Bible contains sixty-six individual books written on several continents, in three different languages, over a period of approximately fifteen hundred years by more than forty authors. Incredibly, it remains one unified book from beginning to end without contradiction. It is one message from One God. In it we see nothing but truth about how a loving, merciful, and just God deals with sinful men in all kinds of situations. We see grace directed toward individuals like Noah, who in the midst of a perverted society, “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8 KJV). We see God's grace directed toward an entire evil city who merited anything but mercy, even though his chosen messenger, Jonah, objected so much to the concept of grace for the Ninevites that he ran away. Truly, the Bible is God's truth-filled love letter to humankind. We see God lovingly and mercifully calling people into a special relationship with Himself, not because we deserve it, not because we have successfully hidden the truth about our condition, but because He is a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.

### THE LAST LAMB

Because God is totally righteous and completely holy, the fact is that all sin—past, present, and future—must be judged. Yet God, in His infinite love, provided a payment for sin and a way of reconciliation from the first sin in the garden so that we could escape the consequences and enjoy grace. In the Old Testament, God provided a sacrificial system whereby atonement could be made for sin. This sacrificial system was only temporary and had to be repeated over and over again. It merely looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ who would die on the cross to pay for our sins. Hundreds of thousands of lambs were sacrificed each and every year on behalf of undeserving sinners. Then came Jesus.



John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin, was the last of the truth-telling prophets who pointed the way to Christ. He forcefully declared to those who felt they didn't need grace that their religious heritage and elite parentage did not exclude them from being desperately undeserving. John also informed those who thought that grace could never be an option for them because they were so low and insignificant that they, too, were targeted by God. He attracted large crowds because of his bold message and memorable presentation. Some even became disciples of the unusual rabbi. John had grown up as a priest's son. He had witnessed and participated in the slaughter of countless lambs for sacrifice. Can you imagine the thrill that trembled through his voice, down to the depths of his soul, when he looked up one afternoon from his baptizing in the Jordan and saw the personification of his hopes, dreams, and preaching come down to the river? He immediately recognized grace and truth in human form. He called out to all who could hear, "Look! It's the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

His Jewish hearers knew this assertion was either incredible insight direct from the heart of God or bold blasphemy. His cry was a lightning rod that magnetized faith in some and ignited rebellious hatred in others. John the Baptist knew and told the absolute truth about the man walking by the water: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

That's the most amazing thought. It is wildly incredible that undeserving sinners can receive grace—but even more so that grace would actually come looking for us. Who could ever imagine it? It doesn't sound remotely true. Yet that is exactly what happened through Jesus Christ. Truth jumped off the page and became a person instead of just a principle. When Jesus walked in, grace walked in. Grace and truth found complete perfection in the person of Jesus Christ.

When we look at ourselves as individuals, families, or organizations, our struggle for balance between grace and truth is immediately apparent. We easily teeter from one extreme to the other. But in Jesus, we don't find *balance*. We find 100 percent of both. He is 100 percent truth, 100 percent grace: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

## DOORWAY TO GRACE AND TRUTH

While the Old Testament is utterly reliable and everything in it is true, it does not encompass *all* truth. *Jesus* is all truth. He had the audacity to claim, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). He could not have been clearer. He is not *a* way, *a* truth, or *a* life. He doesn't just have good counsel for life; Jesus is *the only* way to life, the *truth* in life, and *life* itself.

Interestingly, Jesus didn't call Himself "Grace." The word *grace* is only found four times in the Gospels, the record of Jesus' earthly life, and it is never used by Jesus. Jesus proved that He was the embodiment of grace by His life. How did he do that?

1. *He came.* We celebrate with the angel's message: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord...Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:10–11, 14).

That's grace, my friend. The good news is for all the people, which means His undeserved favor, His grace, is for all the people. What does favor look like? Jesus. God is not against us—He is for us! He is with us. Jesus is grace.

2. *He announced grace for the last, the lowest, and the least.* His inaugural message declared that He was the fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah had foretold: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19; see also Isaiah 61).

I used to think this verse was sharing the over-the-top love of Jesus for those struggling with life’s brokenness and baggage. But Jesus was describing all of us. Relative to God, we are *all* the last, the lowest, and the least. Every one of us is needy. We are all getting the favor and blessing we don’t deserve and cannot earn.

3. *He favored stories about grace.* Luke 15 records His most famous and cherished story of the lost son. He was an ordinary, rebellious young man who blew every penny of his dad’s inheritance and in disgrace returned home to be his father’s hired hand. Instead, the returning boy was received again as a son. The same chapter tells about a lost coin that did nothing to be found and a lost sheep that was found when the shepherd left ninety-nine other sheep to search for the wanderer. Without even saying the word *grace*, Jesus let it be known that he was *for* us. His stories demonstrated that we are the coin worth searching for, we are the little lost sheep He will give anything to find, we are the son who is no longer worthy, yet finds himself embraced by total grace.

4. *His default mode was forgiving grace.* “Some men brought to him a paralyzed man, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, ‘Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven’” (Matthew 9:2). It was normal for Jesus to see a person in need and through His amazing grace, address the issues the person didn’t even know he or she had. The man came to Jesus, not even on his own effort, and was simply looking to walk. Jesus went straight to the heart of his problems with grace for all his needs. He healed his spiritual condition and his physical condition both, when the man had earned neither.

5. *He only required what everyone could give.* “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12–13).

## MESSY AND INCONSISTENT

### AN INCONSISTENT TRUTH

Let’s compare Jesus’ handling of two different women. Mary and Martha were sisters who with their brother Lazarus were among Jesus’ closest friends. They lived in Bethany, and their home (actually, Luke 10 says it was Martha’s home) became Jesus’ favorite resting place when He traveled in that area.

One day Mary and Martha learned that Jesus and His disciples were coming to visit, and Martha went into immediate Martha Stewart mode, preparing everything just right for the Master's visit. Mary, not so much. She couldn't wait till Jesus got there. As soon as He arrived, she went in with Lazarus and the other men and became an absorbed learner at His feet. Martha was beyond irritated. "Lord, don't you even care that my sister has left me to do all this work by myself? Tell her to help me!" He offered no criticism to Mary, and even worse, no sympathy to Martha. He just ladled out truth with incredible grace. I can imagine Him with a slight smile and a shake of the head saying, "Martha, Martha. You are worried and all worked up about many things. Only a few things are really important. Or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

The next woman's interaction with Jesus is definitely hard to process when considered right after He set the bar so seemingly high for Martha. We don't know her name, only that she was a Samaritan (John 4). Jesus met this woman at a well where she was drawing water at the hottest part of the day because her past life was so embarrassing and shame-filled. She didn't want to go to this public gathering spot when she might run in to the wolf whistles and jokes of the men, or the catty remarks of the women. Jesus showered her with grace. He spoke kindly to her, treated her with great respect and dignity, even engaged her in spiritual conversation.

Then He crossed the line. This woman, already hiding out because of her shame, had a big bad secret—and He knew it. She'd been married five times and was currently living with a man to whom she was not married. So, Jesus jumped right into the middle of her shame and said, "So, go get your husband. I'd like to talk to him." She answered back, "I have no husband." Jesus looked her dead-on and said, "You got that right. You have had five husbands, and the man you are living with right now is not your husband."

But then, Jesus is 100 percent truth *and* 100 percent grace. He exposes the truth so He can give her grace. Truth does its work and then He offers her 100 percent grace. "You can't imagine who I am. I am the One for whom you have been waiting. I can meet the needs no other person, man or woman, can. I will give you living water, life forever. Right now, just as you are." It was exactly what she needed.

## FIND THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Once, a wealthy and very good young man pursued Jesus to find out how he could have eternal life. Jesus answered him with the same formula any of the religious leaders of the day would share, "Keep the commandments."

The young man's response would make any parent or pastor proud. "Master, I have kept all the commandments since I was a boy." Jesus knew all things, so he knew the young man's résumé report was right. He was a rule-keeper, a performer, and told the truth. Nowhere in the Bible can we read that Jesus said "I love you" to anyone, but right here we read that he looked at this really incredible guy and loved him. But then Jesus raised the bar. "Go, sell everything you have and give the proceeds to the poor. When you have unloaded all the things that occupy your mind day and night, come follow Me." He knew the young man's heart and knew what was required for him to truly acquire eternal life. And it was too much. The really rich, really good young man turned and walked away. The disciples were listening and asked with confusion I can totally understand, "If he doesn't make the cut, who can?"

The answer is surprising. You have to really *get* truth and grace to make sense of it. At the very end of Jesus' ministry, His total truth had gotten Him in trouble with some people, and His complete grace was an issue to others. Their hatred led Him to a hasty, fixed trial and death by crucifixion.

He was nailed on the center cross, between two actual criminals. As they hung there, dying all day long, one of the men became more and more bitter and hate-filled. The other criminal observed the grace that hung beside him, and his heart, the same heart that had given birth to evil so dark he was dying because of it, reached out for what he saw. Between labored breaths, he said to Jesus, "This other guy and I—we deserve to die. But you—there is no wrong in you. Remember me when you go to your kingdom." Jesus simply looked at him and said, "I am telling you the absolute truth. Where I am going, you are going. Today you will be with me in Paradise."

Jesus called sin *sin*. He named it. He didn't tiptoe around it. He was 100 percent of the time 100 percent honest about it. He knew sin was so destructive that only He could pay for it. That was why He came to earth. On that cross, a short while after His conversation with the criminal with a changed heart, Jesus cried out, "*Tetelestai!* It is finished." With that, He bowed His head and died (see John 19:30). The word He used is a fist-pumping shout of victory. It means, "I have accomplished what I set out to do." It's the kind of word you would say when you make your last payment on your car, or when you cross the finish line in your first 5K race. Jesus came to pay the debt for our sin, and on the cross, He did. We could never deserve it. We didn't even know to ask for it. It is complete grace, unmerited favor.

## LIVE WHERE TRUTH MEETS GRACE

And now we who have accepted this amazing grace and truth are to accept the challenge of imitating Him as we follow, dispensers of grace and truth. We don't get to choose which one we like and feel we do best. As His representatives, we are to be like Him, full of both. These two necessary elements are not incompatible. They are interdependent. Yet we find it so difficult. We all tend to lean to one side or the other.

That takes us back to messy and inconsistent. Back to accusations of injustice and unfairness. Back to not having a list to follow and check off in every situation. Back to no easy answers and formulas. Back to where Jesus lived.

Some people loved to be around Jesus. Others were offended by Him. But Jesus wasn't concerned about others' comfort and reputations, and certainly not His own. He loved without condemning or accusing. He was truth and grace. He lived in the beautiful tension of walking with His perfect Father and imperfect grace-starved, truth-starved people, from the fullness of grace and truth, dispensing just what was needed at just the right time.

This is our privilege and calling: to embody both His truth and grace.

It begins with new birth, when we accept our need for salvation and redemption that we can never earn, and we receive it from Jesus Christ. We are born into a new family, and empowered by the Spirit of God to actually receive the rights of children of God (see John 1:12). Jesus nailed this truth after His resurrection when He told Mary to tell all of His disciples, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father" (John 20:17). He said we have the same divine DNA.

## JESUS CON CARNE

Everywhere the first followers of Jesus went, people changed. Culture changed. Truth and grace have that effect anywhere you take them together. Not everyone loved and accepted them, however, as not everyone had loved and followed their Leader. But everyone noticed them. Sometimes these Christlike ones were rejected and persecuted, but when they were, it was always for the same reason that Jesus was and for the same reason He said it has always been so:

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*

*Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

MATTHEW 5:10–12

That is our privilege and responsibility—to be a walking, talking, reliable picture of Jesus. Like the apostles, we can give truthful testimony, while we receive and share God’s grace. “Jesus con carne” is generally received with relief and gratitude, sometimes with curiosity. On the occasions when a faithful representation of truth and grace is rejected, God promises that He will reward us, and will take responsibility for the persecutors Himself.

If we are honest, often the bitter and hostile reaction of the world toward people called Christians has little or nothing to do with doing good as Christ did. It’s more often because we mangle our handling of truth and grace. We self-righteously wield truth as a sword, or for our own purposes we use grace as a cover-up.

**Truth and grace are not incompatible.** They are inseparable for a true Jesus follower. Many people call themselves Christians. You will find them in every class and description, often believing and behaving in polar opposition to one another. Notably, Jesus never used the word *Christian*. The only word He used for those who left all to follow Him was *disciple*. If we are truly His disciples, the truth and grace that found perfection in Him will become our ever-growing characteristics as well.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mason Young, B., & Young, B. M. (2013). [\*Grace and truth: finding balance in the christian life\*](#). Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Books.

# THE INTERSECTION OF GRACE & TRUTH

## THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

The Ten Commandments arrived in the midst of that harsh and broken Old Testament world not to “fix” the world, but to be God’s diagnostic X-ray into their hearts. It served to show what was “broken.” The Law was not the cure. It is only a diagnostic tool. After the Law did its job, after it had served its purpose, then Jesus came into the world to heal our brokenness. John 1:17 testifies, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

That’s why the New Testament seems so different. The Law has done its job. We humans have been diagnosed as badly broken, unable to meet the requirements of or live within the guardrails established by a holy God. In walks Doctor Jesus, full of grace and truth, the two essential ingredients for our salvation and healing. He comes looking for the broken, offering all He has for all we need.

Psalm 85:10 (KJV) sings, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.” In Jesus Christ, truth and grace have met together, they have kissed each other. And we live within that embrace. That’s nothing less than amazing. Simply and utterly astonishing.

## THE TRUTH ABOUT TRUTH

### ABSOLUTE TRUTH

No, it is not possible that truth varies from person to person according to time and place. The very definition of truth assures us that it cannot be explained by individual perceptions. Truth sits above and outside our perceptions and desires. It is reality. It is permanent. It is indisputable. And truth really matters.

Universal truth is a difficult concept for those of us born and bred in the “have it your way” environment of options. If we don’t like what’s being served up in one place, we have a street full of options, tangibly and emotionally. Apparently almost any belief or practice is verifiable and true as long as “everyone says” or “everyone agrees” or “everyone is doing it.” We prefer personal choice and/or group approval—anything that is subjective and morphing—over hard and fast truth. We even sing our values—that personal truth trumps everything else: “If loving you is wrong, I don’t want to be right.”<sup>2</sup>

This rejection of truth was described by the apostle Paul to his young student Timothy: “For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Timothy 4:3). Those who seek “truth” to suit their own desires often accuse others who cling to absolute truth of being arrogant and stubborn. But as Tony Dungy, author of *The Mentor Leader* says, “Stubbornness is a virtue if you are right.” It’s not arrogance to know the truth and refuse to be moved from it.

**The bottom line on any truth is that we can't change it. Truth is intended to change us.** When confronted with an uncomfortable or even painful truth, it's not wise to look for something more palatable and declare it "my truth." Romans 1:25 describes this choice: "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie." It's not wise to be angry at the truth. The only wise response is to accept the truth as a gift and make the necessary adjustments exposed by the truth.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF TRUTH

God has always been committed to showing us truth and making it simple. For instance, the Bible says God put the law of sowing and reaping into our universe. From the beginning of time, this truth has been self-evident: You will reap what you sow. If you plant tomato seeds, you won't get watermelons. You will get tomatoes, no matter how much you want watermelons and even believe that watermelons will sprout. Throughout the Bible, God uses the truth we see in nature as a principle for our lives. Reaping and sowing are inseparable. It's not a threat; it's a statement of absolute verifiable fact. And it is a gift to us. When we know the absolute, unchanging truth, we can make wise, reliable choices based on the results we know we want. We are all happier with our lives when we are able to make our choices, knowing we can live with the results. It's not truth *or* consequences. Truth always has consequences. Some are good, even great—and some are unfathomably hard.

Dr. Daniel Hahn, in a book entitled *Teaching Your Kids the Truth About Consequences*, says the consequences of our choices typically fall into two categories—natural and logical. Natural consequences are those outcomes that come "naturally" from our decisions based on our response to truth. The teacher issues truth: Do your homework, and you'll pass the class. Don't do it and you will fail. If you spend your money on this, you won't have money for that.

Some natural consequences take years, even a lifetime, to materialize. You can plant an acorn, and the growth will be almost imperceptible for a while. But given enough time in good soil, a tree will grow. And it will be an oak tree, not an apple tree. Those are natural consequences. Spiritually, relationally, and in character issues, the natural consequences may take a while to appear, so we can deny or refuse to recognize truth. And in the short term, some very bad decisions and truly evil people appear to be winning. Drug abuse can be exciting—for a while. Cheating doesn't seem all that bad—for a while. But the truth is, results are coming. Those decisions will bring the results truth says they will.

Logical consequences are immediate, obvious consequences used to shape behavior and teach an appreciation and respect for truth. It's the kind of thing parents could use to teach a child financial wisdom. Parents might give their high school student a certain amount of money to buy clothes for the school year. If she blows it all on a "label," that's her choice. But the truth is, she will have to live with not having enough resources for everything she needs. Parents don't let the logical consequences play out in order to punish their children or make them fail. They use the truth and consequences to enable success in the long run.

God has set the law of truth and consequences, reaping what you sow, into the universe. As a wise and loving Father, He also uses logical consequences from time to time to help us respect His truth. As Andy Stanley says, "He doesn't want to pay you back, but to bring you back." Back to the absolute truth that will save you.

God's gift of love to us is absolute truth. When we neglect, reject, or drift away from truth, we unwittingly choose the consequences that are an essential part of truth. Then some morning we will wake up, rub our eyes, and shake our heads in disbelief at the place our "truth" has taken us. He wants His absolute and unchanging truth to protect and provide for us, not punish us. Truth. It's absolute. It's a gift. It has the power to set us free, and then to teach us and guide us where we need to go.

## GRACE—MORE THAN A PRETTY WORD

*Grace is the voice that calls us to change and gives us the power to pull it off.*

MAX LUCADO

In 2012, Hugh Jackman, Anne Hathaway, and Russell Crowe headed a stellar cast, bringing to cinema Victor Hugo's classic *Les Misérables*. A packed theater watches, to-tally devoid of the usual chatter. Except for the sounds of quiet weeping, riveted silence reigns for the entire showing. Why? Because the moviegoers identified with the story's main character, Jean Valjean. We meet him, homeless, wearing tattered clothes in the harsh winter of nineteenth-century France. He was imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sister's seven starving children. Sentenced to prison for five years, he wasn't paroled until nineteen years later, after four unsuccessful escape attempts added twelve years and fighting back during the second escape attempt added two extra years. Nineteen winters in an abusive and uncaring French prison have left him callous and fearless. In the cold winter he walks for four days after his release, discovering that no inn will house him, no tavern will feed him. His last desperate hope is the large door of a bishop's home.

Seventy-five-year-old Monseigneur Myriel has lost much in the French Revolution. In fact, all of his family treasures have been taken, leaving him with only a few items of silverware, a soup ladle, and two silver candlesticks. Valjean expects the usual rejection. Instead, the bishop showers him with kindness and invites him to sit at the fireside. He explains to Valjean that no begging is necessary for "this is not my house—it is the house of Jesus Christ."<sup>4</sup> They share an evening meal of soup, bread, cheese, and wine, using what is left of the bishop's fine silver.

As the evening wears on, the bishop offers Valjean a bedroom, the most comfort he has experienced in nearly two decades. One would expect utter exhaustion and relief to quickly overcome him. But Valjean is restless; he cannot sleep. His bitter, cynical, "look after me because no one else will" lifestyle cannot be dismissed so easily. He cannot resist the glittering temptation of the silverware. He slips from the room and stuffs the silver into his knapsack and runs into the night as the bishop peacefully sleeps.

But Valjean stumbles into truth and the law. The policemen gruffly drag him back to the bishop's house, where Valjean knows the result of his crime will be confirmed, and he will be imprisoned now for the rest of his life. But then something unexpected happens. The bishop has noted his missing guest and silver. As soon as the bishop lays eyes on Valjean, before the policemen can utter a single accusation, the bishop steps forward. But not with the condemnation the frightened ex-con expects.



“Oh, here you are!” the bishop exclaims. “I am so glad to see you. I can’t believe you forgot the candlesticks! Please take them with the other silver I gave you!”

The policemen and Valjean are all stunned. When the bishop sends the policemen away, he turns to Valjean and says, “Jean Valjean, my brother. You no longer belong to evil, but to good. I have bought your soul from you. I take it back from evil thoughts and deeds and the Spirit of Hell, and I give it to God.” Valjean is speechless. Everything he deserves is being dismissed in an offer of grace.

We all know that we have a deep need for undeserved, unmerited grace in our lives. Unearned, unexpected, unimagined grace is breathtaking wherever you find it.

## THE TRUE FACE OF GRACE

**But the beauty of grace is tied to what it is *not* as much as what it is.**

**Grace is not being nice.**

**Grace is not tolerance.**

**Grace is not pretending everything is all right.**

**Grace is not cheap and easy.**

**Grace is not weakness.**

**Grace is not enabling addictions and sin.**

**Grace is not avoiding conflict.**

**Are you getting the picture?**

**Grace is not excusing sin.**

Grace doesn’t simply “put on a happy face” and “gut it through” an unpleasant situation. Grace goes directly to the truth or our sin and takes responsibility. Grace says with a smile, “I am willing to live with the consequences of what you have done. There is no condemnation or retaliation here.” Then grace points to the consequences and says, “Let’s clean up this mess.” Grace does not ignore or celebrate sin.

Grace will not allow you to remain trapped in bondage. Imitation grace will allow you to pity and excuse yourself because this easy decision feels like love, and it’s easier than insisting on change and virtuous living. But authentic grace knows that self-pity and excuses perpetuate addiction and sin, which destroy life and hope. Grace will say, “You’re better than this. Look at the results of your decisions and actions. I love you *and the people your choices have affected*, so I’m not going to let you walk away without taking responsibility.” Grace will persist. When a person appears hopeless, grace does not give up.

Giving someone favor when they don’t deserve it isn’t weakness; it’s supernatural power. Many think that giving second, third, and fourth chances is ridiculously weak and ineffectual. Some people use their unforgiveness and unwillingness to extend grace as a power over others. Truth be told, it is a crippling weakness. Low grace levels make us unwilling or unable to forgive, and the inability to forgive and extend grace makes us bitter and resentful. Grace is the antithesis of weakness. Grace is the power to not let another person’s actions control ours.

Monseigneur Myriel chose grace for Valjean. But Valjean also had a choice. He had to accept the grace. Would he believe his past and his emotions or the priest and grace? He chose grace. Receiving grace transformed him. He became the mayor of a small town. He built a factory and gave jobs to the poor, managing the business with grace. He took pity on a dying mother and raised her child, Cosette, in grace. Yet, for decades he is hunted by the ruthless policeman Javert, and in every encounter Valjean chooses grace.

In the end, Javert, the policeman who rejected grace at every turn, is saved from certain death by Valjean, the man he had relentlessly pursued—a man who would have every reason to rejoice in his demise. But Javert is unable to reconcile his life's work of pursuing this criminal with the nobility and justice shown him by that very man. He is unable to accept grace, and takes his own life by jumping off a bridge into the river Seine.

In contrast, Valjean, knowing he is soon to leave this life, goes to the convent to prepare himself. As he rests in a chair, the spirits of those from whom he has received grace and to whom he has given grace (Cosette's mother and Monseigneur Myriel, who first showed him the beauty of grace) come and escort him to the eternity grace has prepared.

## GRACE FOR ALL?

Life filled with grace is the life worth living. But Javert, the law-abiding, ruthless prosecutor of Valjean, points us past the beauty and freedom of grace to another aspect we have to examine: Many of us accept grace as *beautiful* when it is extended to us but see it as *offensive and questionable* when it is extended to others. Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer was an American serial killer and sex offender who murdered seventeen men and boys between 1978 and 1991. His murders involved rape, dismemberment, necrophilia, and cannibalism. After his arrest and eventual confession, he quickly became one of the most hated men in America.

In what could only be described as amazing grace, inside the prison walls, Jeffrey Dahmer met Roy Ratcliff, a prison minister who became friends with the atheist, pedophile, and mass murderer. In his book, *Dark Journey, Deep Grace: Jeffrey Dahmer's Story of Faith*, Ratcliff details a seven-month friendship that led to Dahmer's repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Ratcliff says he became convinced of Dahmer's sincerity and his admission that he should die for the things he had done. "He was ready to die," Ratcliff said.

You might expect that a depraved sinner finding grace and forgiveness might lead to jubilation in Christian circles, where grace is embraced, touted, and taught. But the general response was far from happy. When Dahmer was beaten to death by a fellow inmate in 1994, the responses reported were rejoicing at his death, and disbelief and disgust that anyone should suggest heaven was his destiny. I was teaching an adult Sunday school class at the time, and his "testimony" incited all kinds of emotion within our group, with most participants solidly rejecting the idea that Dahmer could be forgiven. Even prominent Christians expressed the extreme sentiment "If Dahmer is in heaven, I don't want to go there."



Grace is not always easy to accept, as for Javert, and frequently not easy to extend or even to see given. Deep grace flies in the face of our inclination to condemn. We grace-receivers have a surprising tendency to reject grace for those we feel don't merit it. Grace offends and troubles us because it is too deep, too available, too generous, too uncontrollable, too...well, just *too*. We place limits on our willingness to extend grace, because we have drawn invisible lines. Those who cross our lines no longer deserve grace. We think grace would be a waste, because it is totally unmerited.

But that's just the thing. Grace is *never* deserved. Grace is *never* merited. Grace is *always* unjust. If it were not for grace, this whole planet would be a hell filled with people headed for an eternal hell. Grace gives life hope and meaning. When I see someone I think doesn't deserve grace, it's an immediate diagnosis of my own condition—I am in desperate need of grace. I need something I cannot earn.

Fortunately, God has provided grace for the Valjeans, the Javerts, the Jeffery Dahmers, and the Brenda Youngs of the world. For you, too. The truth is, I have fallen far short of ever earning anything to set me right. But there is just the right grace for me: As the original New International Version of the Bible put it, "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another" (John 1:16). His grace leaves me amazed and breathless.

Truth makes me recognize that deep in my DNA is a grace-rejecting gene. I find myself naturally prone to think critical thoughts and graceless judgments. Though I have learned the political and societal correctness of leaving most of those thoughts unsaid, I am chagrined at how many times my immediate thought about another person is not worthy of the grace I myself have received. From the fullness of His grace, the Holy Spirit shows me the truth about my thoughts, and helps me to choose grace, even when the offer of something so freeing boggles my mind. And that in itself is amazing. Sometimes we shake our heads and say, "Well, I just simply don't know what to believe." Here's a guideline: never believe anything that makes His grace to you and to others seem less than astounding. Because unmerited favor, undeserved blessing, unforeseen grace always is.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Mason Young, B., & Young, B. M. (2013). [\*Grace and truth: finding balance in the christian life\*](#). Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Books.

## Honest Hearts Lead to Honest Worship

Nehemiah knew the value of honesty. Upon hearing of the crumbled walls in Jerusalem, did he fault God? Did he blame heaven? Hardly. Read his prayer: “I confess the sins we Israelites have done against you. My father’s family and I have sinned against you. We have been wicked toward you and have not obeyed the commands, rules, and laws you gave your servant Moses” (Neh. 1:6–7).

Here is the second most powerful man in the kingdom turning himself in, accepting responsibility for the downfall of his people. The scene of his personal confession, however, is nothing compared to the day the entire nation repented. “They stood and confessed their sins and their ancestors’ sins. For a fourth of the day they stood where they were and read from the Book of Teachings of the Lord their God. For another fourth of the day they confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord their God” (Neh. 9:2–4).

Can you picture the event? Hundreds of people spending hours in prayer, not making requests but making confessions. “I’m guilty, God.” “I’ve failed you, Father.”

Such public honesty is common in Scripture. God instructed the high priest to “put both his hands on the head of the living goat, and he will confess over it all the sins and crimes of Israel. In this way Aaron will put the people’s sins on the goat’s head....The goat will carry on itself all the people’s sins to a lonely place in the desert. The man who leads the goat will let it loose there” (Lev. 16:21–22).

By virtue of this drama the people learned that God despises sin and God deals with sin. Before there could be honest worship, there had to be honest hearts.

## The Motivation of Truth

Confession does for the soul what preparing the land does for the field. Before the farmer sows the seed he works the acreage, removing the rocks and pulling the stumps. He knows that seed grows better if the land is prepared. Confession is the act of inviting God to walk the acreage of our hearts. “There is a rock of greed over here Father, I can’t budge it. And that tree of guilt near the fence? Its roots are long and deep. And may I show you some dry soil, too crusty for seed?” God’s seed grows better if the soil of the heart is cleared.

And so the Father and the Son walk the field together; digging and pulling, preparing the heart for fruit. Confession invites the Father to work the soil of the soul.

Confession seeks pardon from God, not amnesty. Pardon presumes guilt; amnesty, derived from the same Greek word as *amnesia*, “forgets” the alleged offense without imputing guilt. Confession admits wrong and seeks forgiveness; amnesty denies wrong and claims innocence.

Many mouth a prayer for forgiveness while in reality claiming amnesty. Consequently our worship is cold (why thank God for a grace we don’t need?) and our faith is weak (I’ll handle my mistakes myself, thank you). We are better at keeping God out than we are at inviting God in. Sunday mornings are full of preparing the body for worship, preparing the hair for worship, preparing the clothes for worship...but preparing the soul?

Am I missing the mark when I say that many of us attend church on the run? Am I out of line when I say many of us *spend life on the run*?

**Am I overstating the case when I announce, “Grace means you don’t have to run anymore!”? It’s the truth. Grace means it’s finally safe to turn ourselves in.**

## A Model of Truth

Peter did. Remember Peter? “Flash the sword and deny the Lord” Peter? The apostle who boasted one minute and bolted the next? He snoozed when he should have prayed. He denied when he should have defended. He cursed when he should have comforted. He ran when he should have stayed. We remember Peter as the one who turned and fled, but do we remember Peter as the one who returned and confessed? We should.

I’ve got a question for you.

How did the New Testament writers know of his sin? Who told them of his betrayal? And, more importantly, how did they know the details? Who told them of the girl at the gate and the soldiers starting the fire? How did Matthew know it was Peter’s accent that made him a suspect? How did Luke learn of the stare of Jesus? Who told all four of the crowing rooster and flowing tears?

The Holy Spirit? I suppose. Could be that each writer learned of the moment by divine inspiration. Or, more likely, each learned of the betrayal by an honest confession. Peter turned himself in. Like the bank robber, he bungled it and ran. Unlike the robber, Peter stopped and thought. Somewhere in the Jerusalem shadows he quit running, fell to his knees, buried his face in his hands, and gave up.

But not only did he give up, he opened up. He went back to the room where Jesus had broken the bread and shared the wine. (It says a lot about the disciples that they let Peter back in the door.)

There he is, every burly bit of him filling the doorway. “Fellows, I’ve got something to get off my chest.” And that’s when they learn of the fire and the girl and the look from Jesus. That’s when they hear of the cursing mouth and the crowing rooster. That’s how they heard the story. He turned himself in.

How can I be so sure? Two reasons.

1. *He couldn’t stay away.* When word came that the tomb was empty, who was first out of the room? Peter. When word came that Jesus was on the shore, who was first out of the boat? Peter. He was on the run again. Only now he was running in the right direction.

Here is a good rule of thumb: Those who keep secrets from God keep their distance from God. Those who are honest with God draw near to God.

This is nothing novel. It happens between people. If you loan me your car and I wreck it, will I look forward to seeing you again? No. It is no coincidence that the result of the very first sin was to duck into the bushes. Adam and Eve ate the fruit, heard God in the garden, and crept behind the leaves.

“Where are you?” God asked, not for his benefit. He knew exactly where they were. The question was spiritual, not geographical. “Examine where you are, children. You aren’t where you were. You were at my side; now you have hidden from me.”

**Secrets erect a fence while confession builds a bridge.**

Once there were a couple of farmers who couldn't get along with each other. A wide ravine separated their two farms, but as a sign of their mutual distaste for each other, each constructed a fence on his side of the chasm to keep the other out.

In time, however, the daughter of one met the son of the other, and the couple fell in love. Determined not to be kept apart by the folly of their fathers, they tore down the fence and used the wood to build a bridge across the ravine.

Confession does that. Confessed sin becomes the bridge over which we can walk back into the presence of God.

There is a second reason I'm confident of Peter's confession.

2. *He couldn't stay silent.* Only fifty days after denying Christ, Peter is preaching Christ. Peter cursed his Lord at the Passover. He proclaimed his Lord at the feast. This is not the action of a fugitive. What took him from traitor to orator? He let God deal with the secrets of his life. "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that God can heal you" (James 5:16).

"If we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins, because we can trust God to do what is right. He will cleanse us from all the wrongs we have done" (1 John 1:9).

**The fugitive lives in fear, but the penitent lives in peace.**

## The Moment of Truth

Again, Jesus has never demanded that we be perfect, only that we be honest. "You want me to be completely truthful" wrote David (Ps. 51:6). But honesty is a stubborn virtue for most. "Me, a thief?" we ask with revolver in one hand and bag of loot in the other.

It wasn't easy for Peter. He considered himself the MVA (most valuable apostle). Wasn't he one of the early draft picks? Wasn't he one of the chosen three? Didn't he confess Christ while the others were silent? Peter never thought he needed help until he lifted his eyes from the fire and saw the eyes of Jesus. "While Peter was still speaking a rooster crowed. Then the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" (Luke 22:60-61).

Jesus and Peter are not the only two in the midnight street, but they might as well be. Jesus is surrounded by accusers, but he doesn't respond. He's encircled by enemies, but he doesn't react. The night air is full of taunts, but Jesus doesn't hear. But let one follower slip when he should have stood and the Master's head pops up and his eyes search through the shadows and the disciple knows.

"The Lord looks down from heaven and sees every person. From his throne he watches all who live on earth. He made their hearts and understands everything they do" (Ps. 33:13-15).

You know when God knows. You know when he is looking. Your heart tells you. Your Bible tells you. Your mirror tells you. The longer you run, the more complicated life gets. But the sooner you confess, the lighter your load becomes. David knew this. He wrote:

When I kept things to myself,  
I felt weak deep inside me.  
I moaned all day long.  
Day and night you punished me.  
My strength was gone as in the summer heat.

Then I confessed my sins to you and didn't hide my guilt.

I said, "I will confess my sins to the LORD,"  
and you forgave my guilt. (Ps. 32:3–5)

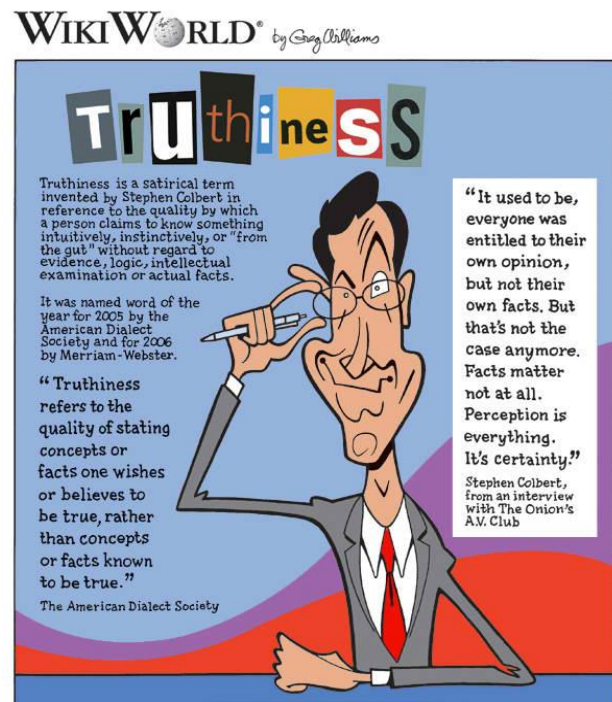
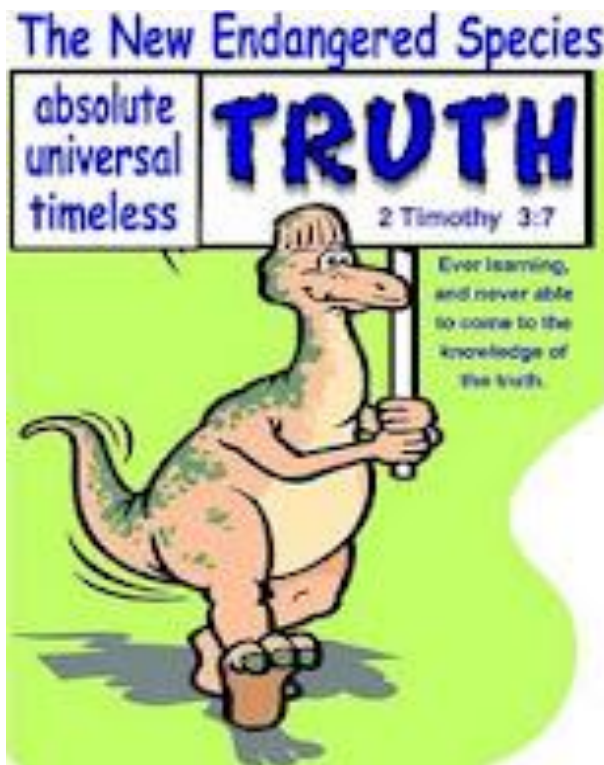
**Your soul was not made to ingest sin.**

May I ask a frank question? Are you keeping any secrets from God? Any parts of your life off limits? Any cellars boarded up or attics locked? Any part of your past or present that you hope you and God never discuss?

Learn a lesson from the robber: The longer you run, the worse it gets. Learn a lesson from Peter: The sooner you speak to Jesus, the more you'll speak for Jesus. You'll feel better if you get it out.

Once you're in the grip of grace, you're free to be honest. Turn yourself in before things get worse. You'll be glad you did.

Honest to God, you will.<sup>29</sup>



Text excerpted from the Wikipedia article *Truthiness*. 22 Jan 2007

<sup>29</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). *In the grip of grace* (pp. 121–129). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

# GRACE ABUSE: HUMAN INTERMEDIARY

Brett & Kate McKay • December 19, 2013 Last updated: May 8, 2019

## The Power of Ritual: The Creation of Sacred Time and Space in a Profane World





# The Sacred and the Profane

The sacred and the profane constitute the “two modes of being in the world.” The sacred represents fascinating and awe-inspiring mystery — a “manifestation of a wholly different order” from our natural (or profane) everyday lives. For the religious man, the profane feels *unreal*, and leads to a state of “nonbeing.” In contrast, the nonreligious man refuses any appeal to mystery or to the supernatural. As a humanist, he believes “man *makes himself*, and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world.” If you’ve ever felt a sense of “nonbeing,” it may be because the modern world has become desacralized, or as Max Weber put it, “disenchanted.” In a traditional society, all of man’s vital functions not only had a practical purpose but could also potentially be transfigured into something charged with sacredness.

## Sacred Time

One of the potent powers of ritual is its ability to set off certain times and spaces as sacred, as “something basically and totally different” than the profane. Let’s talk first about the idea of sacred time.

The sacred power that was present during the original event is re-created. **It is an experience of *ritual remembering* that connects the participant not only to the original actors, but to all those who have performed the same ritual throughout the ages.** In this way past and present are integrated, providing the participant with a sense of continuity; profane time is subordinated and sacred, eternal time emerges.

The power of ritually-created sacred (or at least significant) time applies outside the realm of religion as well. Think of an institution that draws on past traditions to inform its current identity and code of behavior. In such a case the ritual may not release sacred power when reenacted, but simply serves to refresh members’ minds about the founding events and the groups’ basic values, inspiring the inheritors of the legacy to carry them on.

## Sacred Space

Rituals cannot only set apart particular *times* as sacred, but certain *spaces* as well. In religious traditions, these sacred spaces are places where the veil between humans and the transcendent are thin, facilitating communication between heaven and earth. When you step into a sacred space, you can leave the profane world behind. Time is also transcended and you can travel back to the past to participate in your faith's founding events. Entering into sacred space, you enter into a state of "liminality" — a state of being in-between — neither here nor there. Dr. Tom F. Driver explains how this allows you to become someone different than who you are in your "normal" life:

"When people engage in ritual activity, they separate themselves, partially if not totally, from the roles and statuses they have in the workaday world. There is a threshold in time and space or both, and certainly a demarcation of behavior over which people pass when entering into ritual. The day-to-day world, with its social structure, is temporarily suspended."

"When one enters a temple, one enters marked-off space in which, at least in principle, nothing is accidental; everything, at least potentially, is of significance. The temple is a *focusing lens*, marking and revealing significance...

The ordinary (which remains, to the observer's eye, wholly ordinary) becomes significant, becomes sacred, simply by *being there*. It becomes sacred by having our attention directed to it in a special way...

The sacra are sacred solely because they are used in a sacred place; there is no difference between a sacred vessel and an ordinary one. By being used in a sacred place, they are held to be open to the possibility of significance, to be seen as agents of meaning as well as utility.”

### **Where is sacred space?**

When you think of sacred space, houses of worship most likely first come to mind. As you step through their physical thresholds, which are often accentuated by soaring arches or gigantic doors, you move not simply between the street and the sanctum, but between two modes of being – the sacred and the profane.

Many churches today, in an effort not to make potential members uncomfortable with a physical structure and rituals they are unfamiliar with, have modeled their buildings and services on the edifices and entertainments of popular culture, making the transition from the outside world into the sanctuary as seamless as possible. In theory, this does limit the potential for worshippers to experience the manifestations of the sacred as “something basically and totally different...like nothing human or cosmic.” It has been said that sacred ritual *disorients to reorient*, and modern worship often skips the first phase. Ritual, not actual physical structure, is what creates sacred space, so that it can be found anywhere one finds worshippers ritually tapping into the divine.

Rung by rung, Jesus dismantled the ladder of hierarchy that had marked the approach to God. He invited defectives, sinners, aliens, and Gentiles—the unclean!—to God’s banquet table.

Had not Isaiah prophesied of a great banquet to which all nations would be invited? Over the centuries, Isaiah’s exalted vision had clouded over so that some groups restricted the invitation list to Jews who were not physically defective. In direct contrast, Jesus’ version of the great banquet has the host sending messengers into the streets and alleys to invite “the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.”

Jesus’ most memorable story, the Prodigal Son, likewise ends with a banquet scene, featuring as its hero a good-for-nothing who has soiled the family reputation. Jesus’ point: those judged undesirable by everyone else are infinitely desirable to God, and when one of them turns to God, a party breaks out. We’re all oddballs but God loves us anyhow.

Another famous parable, the Good Samaritan, teased its original audience by introducing two religious professionals who gave the robbery victim a wide berth, unwilling to risk contamination from an apparent corpse. Jesus made the hero of this story a despised Samaritan—a choice as startling to that audience as it would be if a modern-day rabbi told a story glorifying a PLO fighter.

In his social contacts as well, Jesus overturned Jewish categories of “clean” and “unclean.” Luke 8, for example, records three incidents in quick succession that, taken together, must have confirmed the Pharisees’ misgivings about Jesus. First Jesus sails into a region populated by Gentiles, healing a naked madman and commissioning him as a missionary to his hometown. From there Jesus proceeds to the home of a synagogue ruler whose daughter has just died. Already “unclean” from the Gentile madman and the hemorrhaging woman, Jesus enters the inner room and touches the corpse.

Levitical laws guarded against contagion: contact with a sick person, a Gentile, a corpse, certain kinds of animals, or even mildew and mold would contaminate a person. Jesus reversed the process: rather than becoming contaminated, he made the other person whole. The naked madman did not pollute Jesus; he got healed. The pitiful woman with the flow of blood did not shame Jesus and make him unclean; she went away whole. The twelve-year-old dead girl did not contaminate Jesus; she was resurrected.

I sense in Jesus’ approach a fulfillment, not an abolition, of the Old Testament laws. God had “hallowed” creation by separating the sacred from the profane, the clean from the unclean. Jesus did not cancel out the hallowing principle, rather he changed its source. We ourselves can be agents of God’s holiness, for God now dwells within us. In the midst of an unclean world we can stride, as Jesus did, seeking ways to be a source of holiness. The sick and the maimed are for us not hot spots of contamination but potential reservoirs of God’s mercy. We are called upon to extend that mercy, to be conveyers of grace, not avoiders of contagion. Like Jesus, we can help make the “unclean” clean.

It took the church some time to adjust to this dramatic change— otherwise Peter would not have needed the rooftop vision. Similarly, the church needed a supernatural prod before carrying the gospel to Gentiles. The Holy Spirit was happy to oblige, sending Philip first to Samaria and then directing him to a desert road where he met a foreigner, a black man, and one judged unclean under Old Testament rules (as a eunuch, he had damaged testicles). A short time later, Philip baptized the first missionary to Africa.

The apostle Paul—initially one of the most resistant to change, a “Pharisee of the Pharisees” who had daily thanked God he was not a Gentile, slave, or woman—ended up writing these revolutionary words: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Jesus’ death, he said, broke down the temple barriers, dismantling the dividing walls of hostility that had separated categories of people. **Grace found a way.**<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [\*Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

# Anointing with Oil – James 5:14

By [Wayne Jackson](#)



In the book of James, the inspired writer exhorts:

“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save him that is sick, and the Lord shall raise him up” (Jas. 5:14, 15).

The sick are still among us. And virtually no one questions the fact that the church should have elders today, where qualified men can be found. Should elders, then, in connection with their prayers, be anointing the sick with oil?

Though this procedure has not been practiced by churches of Christ in modern times (as a general rule), some are suggesting that it ought to be a part of our ritual. How should this matter be viewed?

First, it ought to be noted that this reference to “anointing with oil” (Jas. 5:14) is extremely abbreviated. Nothing is specifically stated in the context as to the design of the practice.

Second, there are no contextual indications that this anointing with oil had any sort of spiritual basis that would make it **universally applicable** or **perpetually obligatory**. If this was to be a requirement for the universal church for all time, it would seem to be a reasonable expectation that some foundation for the practice might have been supplied.

## What Does “Anointing With Oil” Mean?

Commentators are sharply divided as to the meaning of the passage. Certainly any view of this text which comes into conflict with other clear biblical information must be rejected.

Several of the ideas that attempt to explain this ambiguous text are as follows:

### Daily Hygiene

Some suggest that oil was employed as a daily item of toiletry in ancient times (much like cosmetics are used today). In periods of sickness, or fasting, this casual use of oil was suspended (cf. Ruth 3:3; 2 Sam. 12:20; 14:2; Dan. 10:2, 3; Mic. 6:15; Mt. 6:16, 17).

It is argued, therefore, that James may have been exhorting the brethren to accompany their prayers with the “anointing of oil,” i.e., the resumption of their **normal** activities. The oil would serve as a token of **confidence** in the power of their petition.

While this concept may be possible, it does not readily commend itself to the ordinary expositor. Too, it wouldn’t explain why elders would be called to administer the oil.

## Medicinal Treatment

A number of writers contend that the oil of James 5:14 was merely a **medicinal** item, which together with the prayer would be **providentially** efficacious in the healing process.

It is true that oil has medical value for some ailments and that it was employed to this end in ancient times (cf. Is. 1:6; Lk. 10:34). However, oil, as a physical remedy, would be useless in many sicknesses. Moreover, it would appear rather unusual that “elders” would be sought for the administration of **physical** healing techniques when there were good doctors available for that purpose (see Col. 4:14).

One would hardly be inclined to call for elders today for the diagnosis and treatment of physical difficulties.

## Cultural Kindness

Some scholars think that the “anointing” referred to by James was simply a refreshing, encouraging act of friendship, much like when Mary anointed Jesus’ feet (Jn. 12:3; cf. Lk. 7:46). It is argued that the Greek word **aleipho** (“anoint”) has to do with mundane rituals rather than a religious ceremony (yet see Mk. 6:13).

In this sense, James’ admonition would be a call for the elders’ prayers, accompanied by a cultural amenity of that day, which reflected love and friendship.

If such is the case, that primitive culturalism would have no relevance today. Certainly, it would not be a **binding practice** in the modern era.

## Symbolic With Miraculous

Most likely the use of oil, as reflected in this passage, was a **symbolic** act. In Bible times the practice of anointing with oil was frequently representative of God’s approval (see 1 Sam. 10:1; Psa. 89:20). Many biblical scholars are fairly confident, therefore, that the application of oil in James 5:14 was a symbolic act invoked in conjunction with **supernatural** healing.



There are a couple of factors that lend themselves to this view:

There is contextual information elsewhere in the New Testament that associates **miraculous healing** with the anointing of oil. In Mark 6:13 the record states:

“And they [the Lord’s supernaturally endowed disciples] cast out many demons, and **anointed with oil** many that were sick, and healed them.”

This may be the key verse that sheds light on James 5:14.

Additionally, remember that not all Christians in the first century possessed the gift of healing (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28-30). It would be most natural, though, that the **elders** of local churches would be those who were granted the gift in their respective congregations. Ephesians 4:8-11 clearly indicates that some “pastors” (i.e., elders) were given spiritual gifts.

If this view is correct, and in this writer’s judgment it is the most feasible, then the act of anointing with oil would **not** be appropriate today for the simple reason that **miraculous gifts are not available to the church in this age** (1 Cor. 13:8ff).

## **What About Anointing Oil Today?**

Why, then, are a few today anxious to implement the anointing of oil into modern church practice? It could be that some are very sincere, wanting to do the Lord’s will, yet misunderstanding the nature of this passage.

On the other hand, it may be the case that a few folks in the church today are simply looking for a new experience of some sort. Having grown tired of what they perceive as “traditional” service to God, they seek the novel.

May we strive to approach the Scriptures in a respectful yet sensible manner.

# Exploring the Concept of Priesthood

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

The theme of priests and priesthood is prominent within the Scriptures. One is first introduced to the concept of a priest in the book of Genesis, and the role lingers until the sacred canon closes. The office of the priest is mentioned some 700 times in the Old Testament, and approximately 80 times in the New Testament. It is obvious that there is much truth to be learned from this subject.

## What Is a Priest?

A priest, in effect, is a mediator who stands between God and man. He offers sacrifice to God on behalf of man and administers other worship obligations that people feel unworthy to offer personally. The nearest thing to a definition found in the Scriptures is probably Hebrews 5:1.

“For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.”

The presence of a “priesthood” has been characteristic of virtually every society of cultured man since the beginning of time. The ancient Assyrians had priests, as did the Babylonians. When Abram was returning from the rescue of his nephew, Lot, he encountered Melchizedek, who was not only “king of Salem,” he was also a “priest of God Most High.” Abram acknowledged the king’s sacred office and paid tithes to him (Gen. 14:18ff). When Joseph was elevated to prominence in Egypt, he was given a wife who was the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Gen. 41:45).

## Important Implications

Here are some important implications relative to the matter of the phenomenon of universal priesthood.

First, this historical fact reveals a world-wide recognition of the **consciousness of sin** in the human experience. Even without a written law from God, there is an awareness of mankind's moral frailty (see Rom. 2:14-15).

Seneca, the tutor of Nero Caesar, once wrote: "All men have sinned — some more, some less." An ancient Chinese proverb says: "There are two good men — one is dead, the other is not yet born."

Sin is a reality that cannot be denied. There is no man who does not sin (1 Kgs. 8:46; Rom. 3:10,23; 1 Jn.1:10). Every honest person is painfully aware of his imperfection.

Second, the priesthood role is also a testimony to the fact that man feels that he is without merit to atone for his own sins. He longs for, and gropes after, some method for pardon — even from the darkest recesses of paganism.

Third, perhaps it is not without significance that in many priestly cultures, there is the practice of offering blood sacrifices for sin. One cannot but recall how the priest of the temple of Jupiter attempted to sacrifice oxen in his misguided zeal to worship Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:13). In ancient times some pagans even sacrificed their children to their "gods" (cf. 2 Kgs. 16:3; 17:17; Psa. 106:38; Jer. 19:4-5).

The Levitical law brings to light the fact that in the divine scheme of things, blood is necessary for redemption (see Heb. 9:22), because the life of a creature is in its blood (Lev. 17:11). And man, by his sin, has forfeited his right to live (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23).

## **Priests of the Patriarchy**

The first period of Bible history is commonly called the Patriarchal Age. The term "patriarch" derives from two roots meaning "father rule." It encompasses that era between the creation events, and that time when Israel was separated as a special nation (at Sinai) for the preparation of the coming Messiah.

When Noah disembarked the ark following the great Flood, he offered sacrifices on behalf of his family (Gen. 8:20-21). Abram, after a long trek from Ur (stopping for a while at Haran), came into Canaan and built an altar at Shechem (Gen. 12:7; 22:13). Job, the patriarch of Uz, offered sacrifices as the head of his family (Job 1:5). When Moses fled from Pharaoh into the land of Midian, he met and married the daughter of Jethro, a Midianite priest (Ex. 2:15ff).

## **The Aaronic Priesthood**

The formal priesthood of the Mosaic dispensation was known as the Aaronic priesthood, because all the priests were required to be selected from Aaron's (Moses' brother) lineage. However, there apparently was a priesthood of some sort before that time. Moses requested permission from Pharaoh to lead his people into the wilderness so they could "sacrifice unto Jehovah" (Ex. 5:3). Furthermore, certain "priests" were required to sanctify themselves in preparation for the reception of the law on Sinai (Ex. 19:22,24). Some surmise that these were the "elders" (Ex. 3:16), or else a select group of "young men" (Ex. 24:5). This group might have been constituted of the "first-born" who were "sanctified" unto the Lord (Ex. 13:2). Later, the Levites seem to have taken the "sanctified" place of the first-born (Num. 3:5-13). The tribe of Levi was chosen because of its fidelity when Israel worshipped the golden calf at the base of Sinai (Ex. 32:26-29).

When the law was given in the wilderness, Aaron and his sons were appointed to the priesthood (Num. 3:10). The role of high priest was a life-long appointment, and was assumed by the oldest qualified descendant of Aaron. All other male offspring of Aaron served as priests, except in the case of the physically impaired (Lev. 21:17-23), or unless he became temporarily "unclean" (Lev. 22:3). Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement each year (Lev. 16:1ff).

There are some important points that stress great truths regarding the priesthood of the Mosaic dispensation.

## **The Holiness of God**

One of the prime features of the priestly system was to emphasize — and quite graphically — the absolutely holy nature of Almighty God. This is a concept repeatedly affirmed in the Scriptures (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). This fundamental truth must be grasped, as much as is humanly possible, if one is to be motivated to serve the Ruler of Heaven and Earth.

The priestly ministration of the law was characterized by numerous detailed regulations. The high priest, along with the subordinate priests, were required to dress in a particular way so as to reflect the concept of holiness (Ex. 28:4). Some scholars are persuaded that merging lines of evidence indicate that in their official functions priests were required to be barefoot as a token of the fact they were serving a holy God (cf. Ex. 3:5). As noted above, even those men of the family of Aaron who had certain physical deformities were forbidden to serve as priests (Lev. 21:17-23). Apparently the unblemished body of the priest was to be a visual expression of the perfection of the God whom he was serving. Think also about the unblemished nature of the sacrifices (cf. 1 Pet. 1:19).

There were elaborate ceremonies for the “consecration” of priests as they embarked upon their sacred roles (see Ex. 29; Lev. 8-9). The ceremonies lasted for seven days and involved washings with pure water, the adorning of special garments, anointing with oil, the sacrifice of bullocks and rams, etc. All of this was designed to demonstrate that these men were entering the service of God Most Holy.

There is a vast chasm between the perfect purity of our Creator, and the filth of our own transgressions (cf. Prov. 30:12). In studying the priesthood of the Old Testament, we must constantly remind ourselves of this penetrating and humbling truth.

## **Preparation for the Arrival of the Great High Priest**

There is a strong connection between the priestly castes of the Old Testament and the components of the New Testament regime. For example, the arrangement that obtained in the case of Melchizedek, who was both king and priest simultaneously, prophetically foreshadowed the fact that Jesus would serve as king and priest at the same time (Gen. 14:18ff; Psa.

110; Zech. 6:12-13). This circumstance clearly demonstrates that Christ's reign is **heavenly** (not earthly) in scope, because Jesus was not genealogically qualified to function as an earthly priest (Heb. 8:4; cf. 7:14).

One of the major emphases of the book of Hebrews is the fact that the priesthood of the Mosaic economy was typical (pictorial) and thus preparatory in nature. As the inspired writer noted, those elements of the law were a "a shadow of the good things to come" (10:1; cf. 8:5), indeed, he says, "a figure for the time present" (9:9).

The former system was "carnal," while the latter is "heavenly" (Heb. 9:9; 8:5). (Why is it that so many people clamor for the inferior, as evidenced by their inclination to gravitate back to Moses for the alleged authority for their self-willed practices?) The Mosaic priesthood, in some ways, pictured the Christians of the new system (see below). The tabernacle/temple arrangements, in which the priests performed their duties, were typical of both the church (the holy place) and heaven (the most holy place). The blood offerings set forth certain truths concerning him who was offered for our sins (Jn. 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 9:28). How wonderfully the Old Testament served in preparing the way for the arrival of our High Priest (Gal. 3:24; Col. 2:14ff), who is "great" (Heb. 4:14; 10:21), "merciful and faithful" (Heb. 2:17), "the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb. 3:1), and who serves "after the order of Melchizdek" (Heb. 5:10).

## The Christian Priesthood

Just as the Levitical priests were consecrated to their office by the washing of water, even so, men and women today may enter upon their priestly functions as Christians. This they do by drawing near to God with a true heart, having their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water (cf. Heb. 10:22). That this transition occurs at the point of baptism is beyond successful dispute (cf. Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5). Professor Donald Hagner, of Fuller Theological Seminary, says that the term "water" (in Hebrews 10:22) is "almost certainly" a reference to "Christian baptism" (*New International Biblical Commentary — Hebrews*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990, p. 165).

The glorious message of the gospel is this. **All Christians are priests**, and, with spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1ff; Phil. 2:17; 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:5), we offer up service to God through our High Priest, Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1; 4:14ff), who mediates on our behalf (Heb. 2:17ff; 1 Tim. 2:5). It is not surprising, then, that we see references to children of God as “priests” in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6).

## **False Ideas Associated with Priesthood**

We cannot leave this study without calling attention to three false ideas that are associated with the concept of “priesthood” in the modern world of “Christendom.”

### **Catholic Priests Successors of Apostles**

The Roman Catholic idea of a sacerdotal system of physical priests for today’s church has no support of the New Testament. It is based upon the fallacious notion that the apostles “were clothed with the powers of Jesus Christ,” and that Catholic priests, as “successors” of the apostles, are similarly endowed with their power (James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, Baltimore: John Murphy, 1917, p. 387ff). The idea is closely associated with the delusion that in performing the “Mass,” the priests are sacrificing the body of Christ — a notion completely at variance with the Scriptures. The New Testament teaches that Jesus was sacrificed **once**, and that was entirely sufficient (cf. Heb. 9:25-28).

### **Mormons’ Two Priesthoods**

The Mormon theory of priesthood is equally erroneous. Mormonism promotes two priesthoods, without which, supposedly, there can be no salvation. These are the Melchizedek and the Aaronic priesthoods (*Doctrine & Covenants* 107:1-3,5). The Mormon priesthood dogma has no authority higher than that of Joseph Smith, Jr., who claims to have “restored” the ancient order of priests on May 15, 1829. The error in this is all too obvious to anyone with a more-than-minimum acquaintance with the New Testament.

First of all, the **Melchizedek priesthood** was to belong to Christ, and to none other, until the end of time. The writer of Hebrews says concerning Jesus that: “. . . he, because he abides forever, has his priesthood unchangable” (7:24). The key word is “unchangable” (aparabatos), which suggests that the Lord’s priesthood is imperishable. Some suggest that the meaning of the Greek term is simply “permanent, unchangable” (F.W. Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000, p. 97), which, of itself, would eliminate the Mormon idea. But even more to the point is the proposed meaning “non-transferable” (C. Spiqu, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994, 1.143-44). That would specifically deny that it could pass to other persons.

Second, the **Aaronic priesthood** cannot be operative today because it was an integral part of the law of Moses, which law was abolished by Christ (Eph. 2:15), being, in a manner of speaking, nailed to his cross (Col. 2:14). Moreover, the verb rendered “hath taken away” in this latter passage is a perfect tense form, which argues for the **permanent** abolition of that law. There is no biblical indication that the law was to be, or ever will be, restored. Too, one could not restore the Aaronic priesthood without “of necessity” resurrecting the entire Mosaic law (Heb. 7:12).

### **Premillennialism’s Restored Aaronic Priesthood**

Finally, the premillennial speculation that the Aaronic priesthood is “to be resumed nationally, on behalf of Gentiles, in the Millennial Kingdom” is groundless. And it is quite disappointing that this concept was argued so stringently by such a respectable student of New Testament Greek as W.E. Vine (Priest — *Expository Dictionary*). The passages he cites as proof (Isa. 61:6; 66:21) refer to the **Christian dispensation**, not a supposed earthly, millennial kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

And so we conclude our brief study of the subject of “priests,” we remind ourselves of the numerous valuable lessons that come with this theme. At the same time, as we have noted, this is a subject given to serious abuse.



## **A Look At Roman Catholicism (4): The Roman Catholic Priesthood**

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When you decide to look at the Roman Catholic priesthood, you quickly realize the vast quantity of material to be covered. What we intend to cover in this lesson is what the priesthood is, how one becomes a priest, and what are the special effects or powers that come with the priesthood.

The term that is used to describe the rite of ordination into the priesthood is "Holy Orders." The Baltimore Catechism defines "Holy Orders" in the following manner: "Holy Orders is the sacrament through which men receive the power and grace to perform the sacred duties of bishops, priests, and other ministers of the Church. (a) The distinction between clergy and laity is of divine origin, for first, Christ chose the twelve apostles from among His disciples; and in a special way deputed and consecrated them for the exercise of spiritual ministrations; and second, the apostles, who could not mistake the will of Christ, administered the sacrament of Holy Orders by consecrating bishops and by ordaining priests and deacons."

Furthermore, the Catholics teach the doctrine of apostolic succession. In other words, the priest are direct spiritual descendants of the apostles, possessors of certain of the peculiar powers that the apostles had, and that they are the sole possessors of these powers. What we are talking about then is a group of men, successors to the apostles, separate and apart from the rest of the people, who have certain special spiritual powers. These powers, coupled with the position these men hold in the church, elevate them above the rest of their fellow men. That is a capsule view of what the priesthood is. Let us look now at how a man becomes a priest.

The Baltimore Catechism says the following about how a man becomes a priest. For a man to receive the sacrament of Holy Orders worthily, it is necessary "first, that he be in the state of grace and be of excellent character; second, that he have the prescribed age and learning; third, that he have the intention of devoting his life to the sacred ministry;

fourth, that he be called to Holy Orders by his bishop. (b) Those who are called by God to be priests ordinarily receive no special revelation to this effect. God expects all to use the gifts of reason and of grace in determining their state of life. (c) Without a special dispensation no one may be ordained a priest until he is twenty-four years of age. Ordinarily the prescribed learning consists of four years of high school, four years of college, and four years of theology completed in a seminary. (d) The sacred ministry of the priesthood can be exercised either as a diocesan priest under a bishop. or as a member of a religious community under a religious superior. Priests of religious orders make the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Diocesan priests bind themselves to chastity for life and make a solemn promise of obedience to their bishop."

During the course of these years of study, the men preparing for the priesthood go through a number of stages of advancement. The two major ones prior to the priesthood are sub-deacon and deacon. This is primarily what is involved as one makes his way toward ordination. With the lack of vocations that the Catholic Church has been experiencing lately, they have begun to waive some of the requirements. For instance, there is a seminary in Boston that I am aware of which is for what is called a late vocation. These are men who are a little bit older and have decided to become priests. In these cases, their learning consists of three years in the seminary. These too, however, must be recommended by the bishop in the diocese that they will be serving.

Having seen what the priesthood is and how one goes about becoming a priest, let us now look at the special effects or powers that come with the priesthood. The Baltimore Catechism says, "The effects of ordination to the priesthood are: first, an increase of sanctifying grace; second, sacramental grace, through which the priest has God's constant help in his sacred ministry; third, a character, lasting forever, which is a special sharing in the priesthood of Christ and which gives the priest special supernatural powers." It also states, "The chief supernatural powers of the priest are: to change bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and to forgive the sins in the sacrament of Penance." These, then, are the special effects and supernatural powers that go with being a priest.

Our objective will be to examine these three points that we have seen and determine the validity of each. If the priesthood and clergy distinction is taught in the Bible, then we must accept it. If God has set forth in His Holy Word all of those different requirements for a man to become a special minister to Him, then we must accept them. If God did promise to give the special effect and supernatural powers to a select group of people, then we must accept that fact. However, if the Word of God does not teach these doctrines, then we must reject them immediately and follow only what the Bible says.

Let us begin by looking at the existence of the priesthood in the first place. Does this exclusive group of religious people have any right to exist according to God's Word? Does the Bible truly teach the clergy and laity distinction?

In I Peter 2:9, Peter is writing to Christians, specifically those scattered about Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. He is writing to all of those Christians, young and old, men and women. In that particular verse he says, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Peter refers to the entire group of Christians as "a royal priesthood." Do you see a clergy distinction there?

In Rev. 1:6, John is writing to the seven churches which were in Asia. Once again these churches included young and old, men and women. In that verse he said, "And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever. Amen." In other words, all Christians are priests. Do you see a clergy distinction there?

The clergy distinction is an attempt to elevate certain men above their fellow man. It gives the man who is the priest a position of honor and reverence. Now, lest anyone would say that is not the priest's fault, but rather it is the fault of those who give him that honor, look at some of the Catholic doctrine concerning the attitude people are supposed to possess concerning priests. In the Baltimore Catechism, the following statement is made. "Catholics should show reverence and honor to the priest because he is the representative of Christ Himself and the dispenser of His mysteries. (a) In showing reverence and honor to the priest one shows reverence and honor to Christ Himself, for the priest in a very true sense is "another Christ."

In this country it is the custom to honor priests by addressing them with the title `Father.' The custom of tipping the hat to the priest is praiseworthy. The proper way to address a bishop and an archbishop is `Your Excellency:' a cardinal, `Your Eminence:' the Pope is addressed as `Your Holiness.'"

This practice of elevating one man over another is so entirely contrary to the teaching of the scriptures. Jesus taught in Matt. 20:25-28 the following lesson: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Look at the audacity inherent in those titles: "Father," "Your Excellency," "Your Eminence," and "Your Holiness." Brethren, that is in direct conflict with the teaching of the scriptures. Jesus said, "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye\* called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." This "honor and reverence" which the Catholics teach should be given to a certain group of men is not found in the scriptures. As a matter of fact, it is sinful because it is- in direct violation of Biblical principles.

What about the rite of apostolic succession? Let us let Peter tell us what was necessary to be an apostle. In Acts 1:21, 22, he tells us the qualifications for this office, if we may call it that. There he says, "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" Will any priest claim to have been a witness of the resurrected Christ? Will any priest claim to have accompanied the other apostles while Jesus was physically among them? Certainly not. Therefore, no priest could possibly fulfill the requirements for apostleship.

I think one other point will be helpful in our understanding of the fallacy of apostolic succession. The Catholics claim that there is an unbroken line of Popes from Peter unto the present, but they know this is not true. The following dispatch came from Vatican City in January 18, 1947. It says, "Vatican City, as the result of years of investigation into the 1,900 year line of succession of the popes of the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican's new directory has dropped six popes from its old list. It placed two others in doubt as possible anti-popes and lists as a true pope one who had not been included until now." In all, information on 74 different popes was changed. These changes included corrections in the dates of their reign as pope, as well as the assertion that one of them (Pope Dono 2, who was listed as pontiff for three months in the year 173) never really existed. The Catholics have invented this line of apostolic succession as far as the pope is concerned, and then have broken it. I wonder how many of the Catholic laity are aware of this?

What about the requirements for the priesthood? We have already seen that the Bible teaches that we are all priests and that we are all to work to the best of our ability in the service of the Lord. That includes study and preparation (2 Tim. 2:15). But all of the rules and regulations such as age, being called by a bishop, and education simply are not found in the Bible. If they were, then certainly none of the early evangelists, with the possible exception of Paul, would have qualified purely on the basis of education alone. A lot more time spent studying the Bible instead of the years spent studying Catholic theology in some seminary would much better prepare a person to do the work of the Lord. These requirements are nothing more than Catholic dogma.

Let us look now at the supernatural powers given to a priest. The first was the ability to change wine into the blood of Christ and bread into His body. This is known as transubstantiation, and we talked about that in a previous lesson. In that lesson, we showed that that change does not take place and that Jesus never meant it to as He obviously used figurative language when He instituted His supper. *The next supernatural power is the ability to forgive sins. This practice of Roman Catholics is called "Auricular Confession." It is part of the sacrament of Penance and it is called "Auricular" because the sins are whispered privately into the priest's ear in a booth called a confessional.*

The Catholics use a few scriptures to make their case. First is James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Catholics seem to think that this verse reads, "Confess your faults to the priests . . ." but it simply does not say that. The true import of that passage is that the sins to which James refers are to be mutually confessed by Christians one to another. There is no foundation in this passage for confession, privately, to a priest for forgiveness.

The next passage is Matt. 3:5, 6. There we read, "Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins." Confession to a priest is nowhere to be found there. The confession mentioned here was that of the Jews on the occasion of the preaching of John the Baptist. This confession was not made to John, but to God. The context would lead us to believe that this was a confession of sins in general, not in particular. It was the type of confession that the Old Testament frequently records the Jews making (Ezra 9:5-15; Dan. 9:3-20).

The passage that is most frequently used is John 20:22, 23. There we read, "And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." The Catholic contention is that this passage gives ordained priests the power from God to forgive sins that are confessed to them. But this passage does not deal with confession of sins and a priest's power and prerogative to forgive them or not. It deals solely with the power that Christ gave His apostles to forgive and retain sins. This power has nothing to do with private confession to a priest. The apostles were commissioned to preach the gospel of our Lord. When people heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel, they had their sins forgiven; when they rejected the gospel, their sins were retained. Only in this sense did the apostles possess the authority to forgive sins or to retain them.

If the apostles had the power to forgive sins, then Peter's statement in Acts 8:22 would have been unnecessary. Peter said, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Peter could have given him absolution himself if he had possessed the power that Catholic priests claim to possess.

# James 5:13-20 "Is Any Among You Suffering . . ."

Posted by [Mark Mayberry](#) August 15, 2012

By Bobby R. Holmes

I am grateful for the opportunity of being a part of the discussion concerning "Difficult New Testament Passages." I have been assigned James 5:13-16, however, I believe the context of this section of Scripture continues through verse 20, thus we will include those verses as well. I make no claim of knowing all there is to know on the subject. I have wrestled with these passages in the past and after prayerful, careful study, I have arrived at the conclusion that the overall theme in these passages is the power of prayer for those in sin. All I do is invite and encourage each of you to study with me.

Verse 13: "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms." Throughout this book, James has discussed the suffering of Christians. The first twelve verses of the first chapter address the subject of suffering and the profit that comes to those who endure with patience. Note verse ten of the chapter before us. "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience." What is one to do when suffering? The answer is given, "Let him pray." James tells us how we are to pray "But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways" (James 1:6-8, NKJV). Next in the verse he asks, "Is anyone cheerful?" and then tells us what to do, "Let him sing psalms."

Verses 14-15: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing ‘him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick; and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” The question that comes to mind here is this, is the “sick” here referring to a physical sickness or is it spiritual in nature? Many have asserted it to be a physical illness but I believe that is assumed. I pose some questions for consideration. Why call for the elders of the church to pray for a physical illness? It is said that it was because they had the spiritual gift of healing, but that is assumed. Not all had this gift and being elders did not automatically grant them this gift. One real important question that has led me to believe the sickness here was spiritual in nature is in regard to the work of elders.

What is the purpose and work of elders? When we consider the following passages I believe we must conclude that their work is spiritual in nature. “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28, NKJV). “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb.13:17, NKJV). There are many others but these will suffice to show the purpose and work of elders is spiritual in nature. Yes, elders are to be concerned about the physical welfare of the saints as well but, in reference to the context before us and in view of lack of evidence that all elders had the gift of healing (and for the verses to have any import all elders would have had to have the gift of healing else the verses lose their meaning), I believe the “sick” referred to are those spiritually ill. In addition, the word “sick” can be used to refer to one who is “made weak” according to Strong’s Concordance. And in verse 15 the word “sick” is used “faint, sick, be wearied” (Ibid. 39). There are other questions that pose a problem if the sickness here is physical in nature. What of the churches that had no elders?



Who would the elders call if they are sick? Are not all members of the church to pray for the sick and not only the elders? In case someone should make the point that all members are also to be concerned about and pray for the spiritually sick I state here that I heartily agree and though we are not to the verse yet, I refer you to verse 16 that encourages this very thing. “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” Let us go back to verse 14. What about “anointing him with oil”? Anointing with oil was a common practice in the Old Testament. It was used in two ways. As a ceremonial way as found in 1 Samuel 16:13. This served to symbolize an event. It also was used for medicinal purposes as found in Isaiah 1:6. Since the con-text must decide the purpose of the anointing let us look carefully at it. Looking at verse 15 it says, “And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” Strong says that the word “save” as used here means “to save, i.e., deliver or protect (lit. Or fig.) heal, preserve, save, be (make) whole.” Thayer says “to make well, heal, re-store to health (all understand this as including spiritual healing)” and refers to James 5:15 as one of the verses.

Verse 16: “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” The context alone would demand that the subject dealt with is spiritual in nature but to add to this thought, Thayer tells us that the word “healed” here means “to make whole i.e., to free from errors and sins, to bring about (one’s) salvation. James 5:16.” Again, when left in context, the passages are discussing prayer for spiritual healing. Lest I be misunderstood, I certainly do also believe in praying for those sick physically. I am simply discussing what I believe these passages in James 5 are talking about.

Verses 17-18: “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” The example of the faith of and fervent prayer of Elijah is used here to show Christians both of the first century and today the power of prayer. He is not saying that one should or could pray that the earth be stayed from rain for three and a half years, but rather uses this Bible example to give us confidence in the power of prayer from a godly person that prayed fervently.

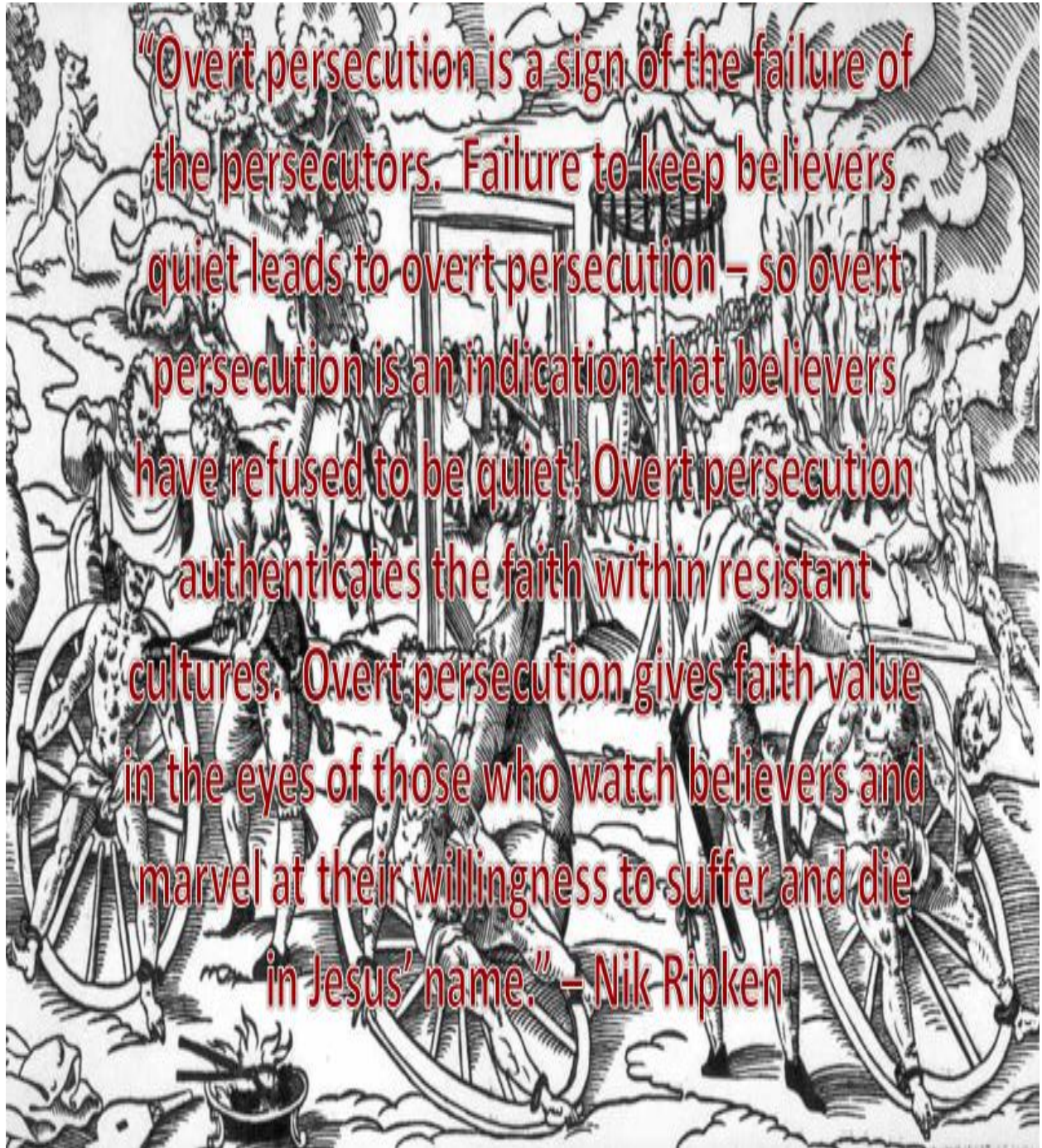
Contextually, it is used in connection with praying for those caught up in sin. The lesson shown here should serve as a deterrent to the lack of faith that some have in the assurance from God that he will forgive us of sins when forgiveness is sought in the proper way. Too many have expressed doubt in such statements as, “I wish I could be sure that God has forgiven me of such and such sin,” etc. These passages in James, when truly believed and heeded, will eliminate such lack of faith.

Verses 19-20: “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.” These verses simply encourage us to reach out to our erring brothers and sisters with loving hands and bring them back to the fold of safety. I trust that this brief study will help some to better understand the exhortations and promises from our Lord.

Guardian of Truth XL: 4 p. 19-20  
February 15, 1996

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...*

***THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER  
OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN  
CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH!  
(James 5: 16 NAS)***



“Overt persecution is a sign of the failure of the persecutors. Failure to keep believers quiet leads to overt persecution – so overt persecution is an indication that believers have refused to be quiet! Overt persecution authenticates the faith within resistant cultures. Overt persecution gives faith value in the eyes of those who watch believers and marvel at their willingness to suffer and die in Jesus’ name.” – Nik Ripken

## Persecution and Aftermath

Chapter 3

AD 247 - AD 420

ROSE PUBLISHING

- **This very worse persecution ended with the death of Emperor Decius in AD 251.**
- **The effects of the persecution lasted for many decades:**
  - During the persecution, many church members sacrificed to Roman gods.
  - Others obtained fake sacrifice certificates.
  - Still others fled and hid from persecution.

## Persecution and Aftermath

Chapter 3

AD 247 - AD 420

ROSE PUBLISHING

- **What about church members who obtained false certificates?**

| CYPRIAN SAID ...   | DONATUS SAID ...  |
|--|---|
| These church members should be given a second chance; re-admit them to the church after they show the authenticity of their repentance through prayer and fasting. | These church members were never true believers; furthermore, if one of them had been a pastor, every baptism or ordination ever performed by that pastor was invalid. |

## The Last Roman Persecution

Chapter 3

AD 247 - AD 420

ROSE PUBLISHING

- **In the early 4th century, Emperor Galerius recognized that, despite harsh persecution, most Christians still refused to worship the gods.**
- **On his deathbed in AD 311, Galerius declared that it was legal for Christians to worship Jesus alone “as long as they don’t disturb the public order.”**

## Roman Persecution: "Getting Certified"

- "There were two all-out empire-wide persecutions intended to utterly destroy the church. The first, under Decius, began in December, 249. Everyone in the empire had to get a certificate from a government officer verifying that he or she had offered a sacrifice to the gods – an act that most Christians in good conscience could not do."

## Hubris Event Is Historically Explanatory: Treasury Of Merit & Auricular Confession

- Decius's persecution exposed weakness in the church after years of prosperity. When the decree was announced in *Antioch*, thousands of Christians surged forward in their eagerness to absolve themselves. In one North African town, there were so many applicants on the appointed day that officials had to ask many of them to return the next day.

### Hubris Event Is Historically Explanatory: Treasury Of Merit & Auricular Confession

- “Decius’s persecution had caught the Christian community flat-footed, and many had renounced the faith. In some cases, like in the city of Carthage in North Africa, it may have been the majority of the Christians. Now many of those people were clamoring to get back in the church. The situation was unprecedented in its scope.”

### Hubris Event Is Historically Explanatory: Treasury Of Merit & Auricular Confession

- “The problem was compounded by the fact that a new kind of martyr came out of the Decian persecution. Because Decius was trying to break people rather than kill them, many people were arrested and tortured but never executed. In previous persecutions, the number of such persons, called *confessors*, was relatively small. Under Decius, the number of confessors was quite large.”

Hubris Event Is Historically Explanatory:  
Treasury Of Merit & Auricular Confession

- “Because of the close relationship between the martyr and Christ in the eyes of the church, many people who were seeking forgiveness for egregious sins would go to the martyrs. Usually, with the martyr’s seal of approval on someone’s repentance, they were allowed back into the church.”

## ***SUPEREROGATION***

### ❖ **Definition:**

“EXCESS SUPPLY  
OF GOOD WORKS  
BY SOME SOULS  
CAN BE APPLIED  
TO OTHERS!”



*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...*

***THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER  
OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN  
CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH!  
(James 5: 16 NAS)***

## JOHN CALVIN @AURICULAR CONFESSION

The divisions of this chapter are,—I. The orthodox doctrine of repentance being already expounded, the false doctrine is refuted in the present chapter; a general summary survey being at the same time taken of the doctrine of the Schoolmen, sec. 1, 2. II. Its separate parts are afterwards examined. Contrition, sec. 2 and 3. Confession, sec. 4–20. Sanctification, from sec. 20 to the end of the chapter.

### *Sections*

1. Errors of the Schoolmen in delivering the doctrine of repentance. 1. Errors in defining it. Four different definitions considered. 2. Absurd division. 3. Vain and puzzling questions. 4. Mode in which they entangle themselves.
2. The false doctrine of the Schoolmen necessary to be refuted. Of contrition. Their view of it examined.
3. True and genuine contrition.
4. Auricular confession. Whether or not of divine authority. Arguments of Canonists and Schoolmen. Allegorical argument founded on Judaism. Two answers. Reason why Christ sent the lepers to the priests.
5. Another allegorical argument. Answer.
6. A third argument from two passages of Scripture. These passages expounded.
7. Confession proved not to be of divine authority. The use of it free for almost twelve hundred years after Christ. Its nature. When enacted into a law. Confirmation from the history of the Church. A representation of the ancient auricular confession still existing among the Papists, to bear judgment against them. Confession abolished in the Church of Constantinople.
8. This mode of confession disapproved by Chrysostom, as shown by many passages.
9. False confession being thus refuted, the confession enjoined by the word of God is considered. Mistranslation in the old version. Proof from Scripture that confession should be directed to God alone.
10. Effect of secret confession thus made to God. Another kind of confession made to men.
11. Two forms of the latter confession, viz., public and private. Public confession either ordinary or extraordinary. Use of each. Objection to confession and public prayer. Answer.
12. Private confession of two kinds. 1. On our own account. 2. On account of our neighbour. Use of the former. Great assistance to be obtained from faithful ministers of the Church. Mode of procedure. Caution to be used.
13. The use of the latter recommended by Christ. What comprehended under it. Scripture sanctions no other method of confession.
14. The power of the keys exercised in these three kinds of confession. The utility of this power in regard to public confession and absolution. Caution to be observed.
15. Popish errors respecting confession. 1. In enjoining on all the necessity of confessing every sin. 2. Fictitious keys. 3. Pretended mandate to loose and bind. 4. To whom the office of loosing and binding committed.
16. Refutation of the first error, from the impossibility of so confessing, as proved by the testimony of David.

17. Refuted farther from the testimony of conscience. Impossible to observe this most rigid obligation. Necessarily leads to despair or indifference. Confirmation of the preceding remarks by an appeal to conscience.
18. Another refutation of the first error from analogy. Sum of the whole refutation. Third refutation, laying down the surest rule of confession. Explanation of the rule. Three objections answered.
19. Fourth objection, viz., that auricular confession does no harm, and is even useful. Answer, unfolding the hypocrisy, falsehood, impiety, and monstrous abominations of the patrons of this error.
20. Refutation of the second error. 1. Priests not successors of the Apostles. 2. They have not the Holy Spirit, who alone is arbiter of the keys.
21. Refutation of the third error. 1. They are ignorant of the command and promise of Christ. By abandoning the word of God they run into innumerable absurdities.
22. Objection to the refutation of the third error. Answers, reducing the Papists to various absurdities.
23. Refutation of the fourth error. 1. *Petitio principii*. 2. Inversion of ecclesiastical discipline. Three objections answered.
24. Conclusion of the whole discussion against this fictitious confession.
25. Of satisfaction, to which the Sophists assign the third place in repentance. Errors and falsehoods. These views opposed by the terms,—1. Forgiveness. 2. Free forgiveness. 3. God destroying iniquities. 4. By and on account of Christ. No need of our satisfaction.
26. Objection, confining the grace and efficacy of Christ within narrow limits. Answers by both John the Evangelist and John the Baptist. Consequence of these answers.
27. Two points violated by the fiction of satisfaction. First, the honour of Christ impaired. Secondly, the conscience cannot find peace. Objection, confining the forgiveness of sins to Catechumens, refuted.
28. Objection, founded on the arbitrary distinction between venial and mortal sins. This distinction insulting to God and repugnant to Scripture. Answer, showing the true distinction in regard to venial sin.
29. Objection, founded on a distinction between guilt and the punishment of it. Answer, illustrated by various passages of Scripture. Admirable saying of Augustine.
30. Answer, founded on a consideration of the efficacy of Christ's death, and the sacrifices under the law. Our true satisfaction.
31. An objection, perverting six passages of Scripture. Preliminary observations concerning a twofold judgment on the part of God. 1. For punishment. 2. For correction.
32. Two distinctions hence arising. Objection, that God is often angry with his elect. Answer, God in afflicting his people does not take his mercy from them. This confirmed by his promise, by Scripture, and the uniform experience of the Church. Distinction between the reprobate and the elect in regard to punishment.
33. Second distinction. The punishment of the reprobate a commencement of the eternal punishment awaiting them; that of the elect designed to bring them to repentance. This confirmed by passages of Scripture and of the Fathers.
34. Two uses of this doctrine to the believer. In affliction he can believe that God, though angry, is still favourable to him. In the punishment of the reprobate, he sees a prelude to their final doom.
35. Objection, as to the punishment of David, answered. Why all men here subjected to chastisement.
36. Objections, founded on five other passages, answered.
37. Answer continued.
38. Objection, founded on passages in the Fathers. Answer, with passages from Chrysostom and Augustine.
39. These satisfactions had reference to the peace of the Church, and not to the throne of God. The Schoolmen have perverted the meaning of some absurd statements by obscure monks.

1. I COME now to an examination of what the scholastic sophists teach concerning repentance. This I will do as briefly as possible; for I have no intention to take up every point, lest this work, which I am desirous to frame as a compendium of doctrine, should exceed all bounds. They have managed to envelop a matter, otherwise not much involved, in so many perplexities, that it will be difficult to find an outlet if once you get plunged but a little way into their mire. And, first, in giving a definition, they plainly show they never understood what repentance means. For they fasten on some expressions in the writings of the Fathers which are very far from expressing the nature of repentance. For instance, that to *repent* is to deplore past sins and not commit what is to be deplored. Again, that it is to bewail past evils, and not again to do what is to be bewailed. Again, that it is a kind of grieving revenge, punishing in itself what it grieves to have committed. Again, that it is sorrow of heart and bitterness of soul for the evils which the individual has committed, or to which he has consented. Supposing we grant that these things were well said by Fathers, (though, if one were inclined to dispute, it were not difficult to deny it,) they were not, however, said with the view of describing repentance, but only of exhorting penitents not again to fall into the same faults from which they had been delivered. But if all descriptions of this kind are to be converted into definitions, there are others which have as good a title to be added. For instance, the following sentence of Chrysostom: "Repentance is a medicine for the cure of sin, a gift bestowed from above, an admirable virtue, a grace surpassing the power of laws." Moreover, the doctrine which they<sup>2</sup> afterwards deliver is somewhat worse than their definition. For they are so keenly bent on external exercises, that all you can gather from immense volumes is, that repentance is a discipline, and austerity, which serves partly to subdue the flesh, partly to chasten and punish sins: of internal renovation of mind, bringing with it true amendment of life, there is a strange silence. No doubt, they talk much of contrition and attrition, torment the soul with many scruples, and involve it in great trouble and anxiety; but when they seem to have deeply wounded the heart, they cure all its bitterness by a slight sprinkling of ceremonies. Repentance thus shrewdly defined, they divide into contrition of the heart, confession of the mouth, and satisfaction of works.<sup>2</sup> This is not more logical than the definition, though they would be thought to have spent their whole lives in framing syllogisms. But if any one argues from the definition (a mode of argument prevalent with dialecticians) that a man may weep over his past sins, and not commit things that cause weeping; may bewail past evils, and not commit things that are to be bewailed; may punish what he is grieved for having committed, though he does not confess it with the mouth,—how will they defend their division? For if he may be a true penitent and not confess, repentance can exist without confession. If they answer, that this division refers to repentance regarded as a sacrament, or is to be understood of repentance in its most perfect form, which they do not comprehend in their definitions, the mistake does not rest with me: let them blame themselves for not defining more purely and clearly. When any matter is discussed, I certainly am dull enough to refer everything to the definition as the hinge and foundation of the whole discussion. But granting that this is a license which masters have, let us now survey the different parts in their order. In omitting as frivolous several things which they vend with solemn brow as mysteries, I do it not from ignorance. It were not very difficult to dispose of all those points which they plume themselves on their acuteness and subtilty in discussing; but I consider it a sacred duty not to trouble the reader to no purpose with such absurdities. It is certainly easy to see from the questions which they move and agitate, and in

which they miserably entangle themselves, that they are prating of things they know not. Of this nature are the following: Whether repentance of one sin is pleasing to God, while there is an obstinate adherence to other sins. Again, whether punishments divinely inflicted are available for satisfaction. Again, whether repentance can be several times repeated for mortal sins, whereas they grossly and wickedly define that daily repentance has to do with none but venial sins. In like manner, with gross error, they greatly torment themselves with a saying of Jerome, that repentance is a second plank after shipwreck. Herein they show that they have never awoke from brutish stupor, so as to obtain a distant view of the thousandth part of their sins.

2. I would have my readers to observe, that the dispute here relates not to a matter of no consequence; but to one of the most important of all, viz., the forgiveness of sins. For while they require three things in repentance, viz., compunction of heart, confession of the mouth, and satisfaction of work,<sup>3</sup> they at the same time teach that these are necessary to obtain the pardon of sins. If there is any thing in the whole compass of religion which it is of importance to us to know, this certainly is one of the most important, viz., to perceive and rightly hold by what means, what rule, what terms, with what facility or difficulty, forgiveness of sins may be obtained. Unless our knowledge here is clear and certain, our conscience can have no rest at all, no peace with God, no confidence or security, but is continually trembling, fluctuating, boiling, and distracted; dreads, hates, and shuns the presence of God. But if forgiveness of sins depends on the conditions to which they bind it, nothing can be more wretched and deplorable than our situation. *Contrition* they represent as the first step in obtaining pardon; and they exact it as due, that is, full and complete: meanwhile, they decide not when one may feel secure of having performed this contrition in due measure. I admit that we are bound strongly and incessantly to urge every man bitterly to lament his sins, and thereby stimulate himself more and more to dislike and hate them. For this is the “repentance to salvation not to be repented of,” (2 Cor. 7:10.) But when such bitterness of sorrow is demanded as may correspond to the magnitude of the offence, and be weighed in the balance with confidence of pardon, miserable consciences are sadly perplexed and tormented when they see that the contrition due for sin is laid upon them, and yet that they have no measure of what is due, so as to enable them to determine that they have made full payment. If they say we are to do what in us lies, we are always brought back to the same point; for when will any man venture to promise himself that he has done his utmost in bewailing sin? Therefore, when consciences, after a lengthened struggle and long contests with themselves, find no haven in which they may rest, as a means of alleviating their condition in some degree, they extort sorrow and wring out tears, in order to perfect their contrition.

3. If they say that this is calumny on my part, let them come forward and point out a single individual who, by this doctrine of contrition, has not either been driven to despair, or has not, instead of true, opposed pretended fear to the justice of God. We have elsewhere observed, that forgiveness of sins never can be obtained without repentance, because none but the afflicted, and those wounded by a consciousness of sins, can sincerely implore the mercy of God; but we, at the same time, added, that repentance cannot be the cause of the forgiveness of sins: and we also did away with that torment of souls—the dogma that it must be performed as due. Our doctrine was, that the soul looked not to its own compunction or its own tears, but fixed both eyes on the mercy of God alone. Only we observed, that those who labour and are

heavy laden are called by Christ, seeing he was sent “to preach good tidings to the meek;” “to bind up the broken-hearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;” “to comfort all that mourn.” Hence the Pharisees were excluded, because, full of their own righteousness, they acknowledged not their own poverty; and despisers, because, regardless of the divine anger, they sought no remedy for their wickedness. Such persons neither labour nor are heavy laden, are not broken-hearted, bound, nor in prison. But there is a great difference between teaching that forgiveness of sins is merited by a full and complete contrition, (which the sinner never can give,) and instructing him to hunger and thirst after the mercy of God, that recognising his wretchedness, his turmoil, weariness, and captivity, you may show him where he should seek refreshment, rest, and liberty; in fine, teach him in his humility to give glory to God.

4. *Confession* has ever been a subject of keen contest between the Canonists and the Scholastic Theologians; the former contending that confession is of divine authority—the latter insisting, on the contrary, that it is merely enjoined by ecclesiastical constitution. In this contest great effrontery has been displayed by the Theologians, who have corrupted and violently wrested every passage of Scripture they have quoted in their favour. And when they saw that even thus they could not gain their object, those who wished to be thought particularly acute had recourse to the evasion that confession is of divine authority in regard to the substance, but that it afterwards received its form from positive enactment. Thus the silliest of these quibblers refer the citation to divine authority, from its being said, “Adam, where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9, 12;) and also the exception from Adam having replied as if excepting, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me,” &c.; but say that the form of both was appointed by civil law. Let us see by what arguments they prove that this confession, formed or unformed, is a divine commandment. The Lord, they say, sent the lepers to the priests, (Matth. 8:4.) What? did he send them to confession? Who ever heard tell that the Levitical priests were appointed to hear confession? Here they resort to allegory. The priests were appointed by the Mosaic law to discern between leper and leper: sin is spiritual leprosy; therefore it belongs to the priests to decide upon it. Before I answer, I would ask, in passing, why, if this passage makes them judges of spiritual leprosy, they claim the cognisance of natural and carnal leprosy? This, forsooth, is not to play upon Scripture! The law gives the cognisance of leprosy to the Levitical priests: let us usurp this to ourselves. Sin is spiritual leprosy: let us also have cognisance of sin. I now give my answer: There being a change of the priesthood, there must of necessity be a change of the law. All the sacerdotal functions were transferred to Christ, and in him fulfilled and ended, (Heb. 7:12.) To him alone, therefore, all the rights and honours of the priesthood have been transferred. If they are so fond then of hunting out allegories, let them set Christ before them as the only priest, and place full and universal jurisdiction on his tribunal: this we will readily admit. Besides, there is an incongruity in their allegory: it classes a merely civil enactment among ceremonies. Why, then, does Christ send the lepers to the priests? Lest the priests should be charged with violating the law, which ordained that the person cured of leprosy should present himself before the priest, and be purified by the offering of a sacrifice, he orders the lepers who had been cleansed to do what the law required. “Go and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing according as Moses commanded for a testimony unto them,” (Luke 5:17.) And assuredly this miracle would be a testimony to them: they had pronounced them lepers; they now pronounce them cured. Whether they would or not, they are forced to

become witnesses to the miracles of Christ. Christ allows them to examine the miracle, and they cannot deny it: yet, as they still quibble, they have need of a testimony. So it is elsewhere said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations," (Matth. 24:14.) Again, "Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles," (Matth. 10:18;) that is, in order that, in the judgment of God, they might be more fully convicted. But if they prefer taking the view of Chrysostom, (Hom. xii. de Muliere Cananæa,) he shows that this was done by Christ for the sake of the Jews also, that he might not be regarded as a violator of the law. But we are ashamed to appeal to the authority of any man in a matter so clear, when Christ declares that he left the legal right of the priests entire, as professed enemies of the Gospel, who were always intent on making a clamour if their mouths were not stopped. Wherefore, let the Popish priests, in order to retain this privilege, openly make common cause with those whom it was necessary to restrain, by forcible means, from speaking evil of Christ. For there is here no reference to his true ministers.

5. They draw their second argument from the same fountain,—I mean allegory; as if allegories were of much avail in confirming any doctrine. But, indeed, let them avail, if those which I am able to produce are not more specious than theirs. They say, then, that the Lord, after raising Lazarus, commanded his disciples to "loose him and let him go," (John 11:44.) Their first statement is untrue: we no where read that the Lord said this to the disciples; and it is much more probable that he spoke to the Jews who were standing by, that from there being no suspicion of fraud the miracle might be more manifest, and his power might be the more conspicuous from his raising the dead without touching him, by a mere word. In the same way, I understand that our Lord, to leave no ground of suspicion to the Jews, wished them to roll back the stone, feel the stench, perceive the sure signs of death, see him rise by the mere power of a word, and first handle him when alive. And this is the view of Chrysostom, (Serm. C. Jud. Gent. et Hæret.) But granting that it was said to the disciples, what can they gain by it? That the Lord gave the apostles the power of loosing? How much more aptly and dexterously might we allegorise and say, that by this symbol the Lord designed to teach his followers to loose those whom he raises up; that is, not to bring to remembrance the sins which he himself had forgotten, not to condemn as sinners those whom he had acquitted, not still to upbraid those whom he had pardoned, not to be stern and severe in punishing, while he himself was merciful and ready to forgive. Certainly nothing should more incline us to pardon than the example of the Judge who threatens that he will be inexorable to the rigid and inhumane. Let them go now and vend their allegories.

6. They now come to closer quarters, while they support their view by passages of Scripture which they think clearly in their favour. Those who came to John's baptism confessed their sins, and James bids us confess our sins one to another, (James 5:16.) It is not strange that those who wished to be baptized confessed their sins. It has already been mentioned, that John preached the baptism of repentance, baptized with water unto repentance. Whom then could he baptize, but those who confessed that they were sinners? Baptism is a symbol of the forgiveness of sins; and who could be admitted to receive the symbol but sinners acknowledging themselves as such? They therefore confessed their sins that they might be baptized. Nor without good reason does James enjoin us to confess our sins one to another. But if they would attend to what immediately follows, they would perceive that this gives them

little support. The words are, "Confess your sins one to another, and pray one for another." He joins together mutual confession and mutual prayer. If, then, we are to confess to priests only, we are also to pray for them only. What? It would even follow from the words of James, that priests alone can confess. In saying that we are to confess mutually, he must be addressing those only who can hear the confession of others. He says, ἀλλήλους, *mutually, by turns*, or, if they prefer it, *reciprocally*. But those only can confess reciprocally who are fit to hear confession. This being a privilege which they bestow upon priests only, we also leave them the office of confessing to each other. Have done then with such frivolous absurdities, and let us receive the true meaning of the apostle, which is plain and simple; *first*, That we are to deposit our infirmities in the breasts of each other, with the view of receiving mutual counsel, sympathy, and comfort; and, *secondly*, That mutually conscious of the infirmities of our brethren, we are to pray to the Lord for them. Why then quote James against us who so earnestly insist on acknowledgment of the divine mercy? No man can acknowledge the mercy of God without previously confessing his own misery. Nay, we pronounce every man to be anathema who does not confess himself a sinner before God, before his angels, before the Church; in short, before all men. "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin," "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God," that God alone may be justified and exalted, (Gal. 3:22; Rom. 3:9, 19.)

7. I wonder at their effrontery in venturing to maintain that the confession of which they speak is of divine authority. We admit that the use of it is very ancient; but we can easily prove that at one time it was free. It certainly appears, from their own records, that no law or constitution respecting it was enacted before the days of Innocent III. Surely if there had been a more ancient law they would have fastened on it, instead of being satisfied with the decree of the Council of Lateran, and so making themselves ridiculous even to children. In other matters, they hesitate not to coin fictitious decrees, which they ascribe to the most ancient Councils, that they may blind the eyes of the simple by veneration for antiquity. In this instance it has not occurred to them to practise this deception, and hence, themselves being witnesses, three centuries have not yet elapsed since the bridle was put, and the necessity of confession imposed by Innocent III. And to say nothing of the time, the mere barbarism of the terms used destroys the authority of the law. For when these worthy fathers enjoin that every person of *both sexes* (utriusque sexus) must once a year confess his sins to his own priest, men of wit humorously object that the precept binds hermaphrodites only, and has no application to any one who is either a male or a female. A still grosser absurdity has been displayed by their disciples, who are unable to explain what is meant by one's own priest, (proprius sacerdos.) Let all the hired ravers of the Pope babble as they may, we hold that Christ is not the author of this law, which compels men to enumerate their sins; nay, that twelve hundred years elapsed after the resurrection of Christ before any such law was made, and that, consequently, this tyranny was not introduced until piety and doctrine were extinct, and pretended pastors had usurped to themselves unbridled license. There is clear evidence in historians, and other ancient writers, to show that this was a politic discipline introduced by bishops, not a law enacted by Christ or the Apostles. Out of many I will produce only one passage, which will be no obscure proof. Sozomen<sup>2</sup> relates, that this constitution of the bishops was carefully observed in the Western churches, but especially at Rome; thus intimating that it was not the universal custom of all churches. He also says, that one of the presbyters was specially appointed to take charge of this



duty. This abundantly confutes their falsehood as to the keys being given to the whole priesthood indiscriminately for this purpose, since the function was not common to all the priests, but specially belonged to the one priest whom the bishop had appointed to it. He it was (the same who at present in each of the cathedral churches has the name of pœnitentiary) who had cognizance of offences which were more heinous, and required to be rebuked for the sake of example. He afterwards adds, that the same custom existed at Constantinople, until a certain matron, while pretending to confess, was discovered to have used it as a cloak to cover her intercourse with a deacon. In consequence of that crime, Nectarius, the bishop of that church—a man famous for learning and sanctity—abolished the custom of confessing. Here, then, let these asses prick up their ears. If auricular confession was a divine law, how could Nectarius have dared to abolish or remodel it? Nectarius, a holy man of God, approved by the suffrage of all antiquity, will they charge with heresy and schism? With the same vote they will condemn the church of Constantinople, in which Sozomen affirms that the custom of confessing was not only disguised for a time, but even in his own memory abolished. Nay, let them charge with defection, not only Constantinople, but all the Eastern churches, which (if they say true) disregarded an inviolable law enjoined on all Christians.

8. This abrogation is clearly attested in so many passages by Chrysostom, who lived at Constantinople, and was himself prelate of the church, that it is strange they can venture to maintain the contrary: “Tell your sins,” says he, “that you may efface them: if you blush to tell another what sins you have committed, tell them daily in your soul. I say not, tell them to your fellow-servant who may upbraid you, but tell them to God who cures them. Confess your sins upon your bed, that your conscience may there daily recognise its iniquities.” Again, “Now, however, it is not necessary to confess before witnesses; let the examination of your faults be made in your own thought: let the judgment be without a witness: let God alone see you confessing.” Again, “I do not lead you publicly into the view of your fellow-servants; I do not force you to disclose your sins to men; review and lay open your conscience before God. Show your wounds to the Lord, the best of physicians, and seek medicine from him. Show to him who upbraids not, but cures most kindly.” Again, “Certainly tell it not to man lest he upbraid you. Nor must you confess to your fellow-servant, who may make it public; but show your wounds to the Lord, who takes care of you, who is kind and can cure.” He afterwards introduces God speaking thus: “I oblige you not to come into the midst of a theatre, and have many witnesses; tell your sins to me alone in private, that I may cure the ulcer.” Shall we say that Chrysostom, in writing these and similar passages, carried his presumption so far as to free the consciences of men from those chains with which they are bound by the divine law? By no means; but knowing that it was not at all prescribed by the word of God, he dares not exact it as necessary.

9. But that the whole matter may be more plainly unfolded, we shall first honestly state the nature of confession as delivered in the word of God, and thereafter subjoin their inventions—not all of them indeed, (who could drink up that boundless sea?) but those only which contain a summary of their secret confession. Here I am grieved to mention how frequently the old interpreter has rendered the word *confess* instead of *praise*, a fact notorious to the most illiterate, were it not fitting to expose their effrontery in transferring to their tyrannical edict what was written concerning the praises of God. To prove that confession has the effect of exhilarating the mind, they obtrude the passage in the psalm, “with the voice of joy and praise,” (Vulgate, *confessionis*,) (Ps. 42:4.) But if such a metamorphosis is valid, any thing may be made

of any thing. But, as they have lost all shame, let pious readers reflect how, by the just vengeance of God, they have been given over to a reprobate mind, that their audacity may be the more detestable. If we are disposed to acquiesce in the simple doctrine of Scripture, there will be no danger of our being misled by such glosses. There one method of confessing is prescribed; since it is the Lord who forgives, forgets, and wipes away sins, to him let us confess them, that we may obtain pardon. He is the physician, therefore let us show our wounds to him. He is hurt and offended, let us ask peace of him. He is the discernor of the heart, and knows all our thoughts; let us hasten to pour out our hearts before him. He it is, in fine, who invites sinners; let us delay not to draw near to him. "I acknowledge my sin unto thee," says David; "and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin," (Ps. 32:5.) Another specimen of David's confession is as follows: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness," (Ps. 51:1.) The following is Daniel's confession: "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and thy judgments," (Dan. 9:5.) Other examples every where occur in Scripture: the quotation of them would almost fill a volume. "If we confess our sins," says John, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," (1 John 1:9.) To whom are we to confess? to Him surely;—that is, we are to fall down before him with a grieved and humbled heart, and sincerely accusing and condemning ourselves, seek forgiveness of his goodness and mercy.

10. He who has adopted this confession from the heart and as in the presence of God, will doubtless have a tongue ready to confess whenever there is occasion among men to publish the mercy of God. He will not be satisfied to whisper the secret of his heart for once into the ear of one individual, but will often, and openly, and in the hearing of the whole world, ingenuously make mention both of his own ignominy, and of the greatness and glory of the Lord. In this way David, after he was accused by Nathan, being stung in his conscience, confesses his sin before God and men. "I have sinned unto the Lord," says he, (2 Sam. 12:13;) that is, I have now no excuse, no evasion; all must judge me a sinner; and that which I wished to be secret with the Lord must also be made manifest to men. Hence the secret confession which is made to God is followed by voluntary confession to men, whenever that is conducive to the divine glory or our humiliation. For this reason the Lord anciently enjoined the people of Israel that they should repeat the words after the priest, and make public confession of their iniquities in the temple; because he foresaw that this was a necessary help to enable each one to form a just idea of himself. And it is proper that, by confession of our misery, we should manifest the mercy of our God both among ourselves and before the whole world.

11. It is proper that this mode of confession should both be ordinary in the Church, and also be specially employed on extraordinary occasions, when the people in common happen to have fallen into any fault. Of this latter description we have an example in the solemn confession which the whole people made under the authority and guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah, (Neh. 1:6, 7.) For their long captivity, the destruction of the temple, and suppression of their religion, having been the common punishment of their defection, they could not make meet acknowledgment of the blessing of deliverance without previous confession of their guilt. And it matters not though in one assembly it may sometimes happen that a few are innocent, seeing that the members of a languid and sickly body cannot boast of soundness. Nay, it is scarcely possible that these few have not contracted some taint, and so bear part of the blame.

Therefore, as often as we are afflicted with pestilence, or war, or famine, or any other calamity whatsoever, if it is our duty to betake ourselves to mourning, fasting, and other signs of guiltiness, confession also, on which all the others depend, is not to be neglected. That ordinary confession which the Lord has moreover expressly commended, no sober man, who has reflected on its usefulness, will venture to disapprove. Seeing that in every sacred assembly we stand in the view of God and angels, in what way should our service begin but in acknowledging our own unworthiness? But this you will say is done in every prayer; for as often as we pray for pardon, we confess our sins. I admit it. But if you consider how great is our carelessness, or drowsiness, or sloth, you will grant me that it would be a salutary ordinance if the Christian people were exercised in humiliation by some formal method of confession. For though the ceremony which the Lord enjoined on the Israelites belonged to the tutelage of the Law, yet the thing itself belongs in some respect to us also. And, indeed, in all well-ordered churches, in observance of an useful custom, the minister, each Lord's day, frames a formula of confession in his own name and that of the people, in which he makes a common confession of iniquity, and supplicates pardon from the Lord. In short, by this key a door of prayer is opened privately for each, and publicly for all.

12. Two other forms of private confession are approved by Scripture. The one is made on our own account, and to it reference is made in the passage in James, "Confess your sins one to another," (James 5:16;) for the meaning is, that by disclosing our infirmities to each other, we are to obtain the aid of mutual counsel and consolation. The other is to be made for the sake of our neighbour, to appease and reconcile him if by our fault he has been in any respect injured. In the former, although James, by not specifying any particular individual into whose bosom we are to disburden our feelings, leaves us the free choice of confessing to any member of the church who may seem fittest; yet as for the most part pastors are to be supposed better qualified than others, our choice ought chiefly to fall upon them. And the ground of preference is, that the Lord, by calling them to the ministry, points them out as the persons by whose lips we are to be taught to subdue and correct our sins, and derive consolation from the hope of pardon. For as the duty of mutual admonition and correction is committed to all Christians, but is specially enjoined on ministers, so while we ought all to console each other mutually, and confirm each other in confidence in the divine mercy, we see that ministers, to assure our consciences of the forgiveness of sins, are appointed to be the witnesses and sponsors of it, so that they are themselves said to forgive sins and loose souls, (Matth. 16:19; 18:18.) When you hear this attributed to them, reflect that it is for your use. Let every believer, therefore, remember, that if in private he is so agonized and afflicted by a sense of his sins that he cannot obtain relief without the aid of others, it is his duty not to neglect the remedy which God provides for him, viz., to have recourse for relief to a private confession to his own pastor, and for consolation privately implore the assistance of him whose business it is, both in public and private, to solace the people of God with Gospel doctrine. But we are always to use moderation, lest in a matter as to which God prescribes no certain rule, our consciences be burdened with a certain yoke. Hence it follows, first, that confession of this nature ought to be free so as not to be exacted of all, but only recommended to those who feel that they have need of it; and, secondly, even those who use it according to their necessity must neither be compelled by any precept, nor artfully induced to enumerate all their sins, but only in so far as they shall deem it for their interest, that they may obtain the full benefit of consolation. Faithful

pastors, as they would both eschew tyranny in their ministry, and superstition in the people, must not only leave this liberty to churches, but defend and strenuously vindicate it.

13. Of the second form of confession, our Saviour speaks in Matthew. "If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remember that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift," (Matth. 5:23, 24.) Thus love, which has been interrupted by our fault, must be restored by acknowledging and asking pardon for the fault. Under this head is included the confession of those who by their sin have given offence to the whole Church, (*supra*, sec. 10.) For if Christ attaches so much importance to the offence of one individual, that he forbids the sacrifice of all who have sinned in any respect against their brethren, until by due satisfaction they have regained their favour, how much greater reason is there that he, who by some evil example has offended the Church, should be reconciled to it by the acknowledgment of his fault? Thus the member of the Church of Corinth was restored to communion after he had humbly submitted to correction, (2 Cor. 2:6.) This form of confession existed in the ancient Christian Church, as Cyprian relates: "They practise repentance," says he, "for a proper time, then they come to confession, and by the laying on of the hands of the bishop and clergy, are admitted to communion." Scripture knows nothing of any other form or method of confessing, and it belongs not to us to bind new chains upon consciences which Christ most strictly prohibits from being brought into bondage. Meanwhile, that the flock present themselves before the pastor whenever they would partake of the Holy Supper, I am so far from disapproving, that I am most desirous it should be everywhere observed. For both those whose conscience is hindered may thence obtain singular benefit, and those who require admonition thus afford an opportunity for it; provided always no countenance is given to tyranny and superstition.

14. The *power of the keys* has place in the three following modes of confession,—either when the whole Church, in a formal acknowledgment of its defects, supplicates pardon; or when a private individual, who has given public offence by some notable delinquency, testifies his repentance; or when he who from disquiet of conscience needs the aid of his minister, acquaints him with his infirmity. With regard to the reparation of offence, the case is different. For though in this also provision is made for peace of conscience, yet the principal object is to suppress hatred, and re-unite brethren in the bond of peace. But the benefit of which I have spoken is by no means to be despised, that we may the more willingly confess our sins. For when the whole Church stands as it were at the bar of God, confesses her guilt, and finds her only refuge in the divine mercy, it is no common or light solace to have an ambassador of Christ present, invested with the mandate of reconciliation, by whom she may hear her absolution pronounced. Here the utility of the keys is justly commended when that embassy is duly discharged with becoming order and reverence. In like manner, when he who has as it were become an alien from the Church receives pardon, and is thus restored to brotherly unity, how great is the benefit of understanding that he is pardoned by those to whom Christ said, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them," (John 20:23.) Nor is private absolution of less benefit or efficacy when asked by those who stand in need of a special remedy for their infirmity. It not seldom happens, that he who hears general promises which are intended for the whole congregation of the faithful, nevertheless remains somewhat in doubt, and is still disquieted in mind, as if his own remission were not yet obtained. Should this individual lay open the secret wound of his soul to his pastor, and hear these words of the Gospel specially

addressed to him, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," (Matth. 9:2,) his mind will feel secure, and escape from the trepidation with which it was previously agitated. But when we treat of the keys, we must always beware of dreaming of any power apart from the preaching of the Gospel. This subject will be more fully explained when we come to treat of the government of the Church, (Book IV. chap. xi. xii.) There we shall see, that whatever privilege of binding and loosing Christ has bestowed on his Church is annexed to the word. This is especially true with regard to the ministry of the keys, the whole power of which consists in this, that the grace of the Gospel is publicly and privately sealed on the minds of believers by means of those whom the Lord has appointed; and the only method in which this can be done is by preaching.

15. What say the Roman theologians? That all persons of both sexes, so soon as they shall have reached the years of discretion, must, once a year at least, confess all their sins to their own priest; that the sin is not discharged unless the resolution to confess has been firmly conceived; that if this resolution is not carried into effect when an opportunity offers, there is no entrance into Paradise; that the priest, moreover, has the power of the keys, by which he can loose and bind the sinner; because the declaration of Christ is not in vain: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven," (Matth. 18:18.) Concerning this power, however, they wage a fierce war among themselves. Some say there is only one key essentially, viz., the power of binding and loosing; that knowledge, indeed, is requisite for the proper use of it, but only as an accessory, not as essentially inherent in it. Others, seeing that this gave too unrestrained license, have imagined two keys, viz., discernment and power. Others, again, seeing that the license of priests was curbed by such restraint, have forged other keys, (*infra*, sec. 21,) the authority of discerning to be used in defining, and the power to carry their sentences into execution; and to these they add knowledge as a counsellor. This binding and loosing, however, they do not venture to interpret simply, to forgive and wipe away sins, because they hear the Lord proclaiming by the prophet, "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour." "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions," (Isaiah 43:11, 25.) But they say it belongs to the priest to declare who are bound or loosed, and whose sins are remitted or retained; to declare, moreover, either by confession, when he absolves and retains sins, or by sentence, when he excommunicates or admits to communion in the Sacraments. Lastly, perceiving that the knot is not yet untied, because it may always be objected that persons are often undeservedly bound and loosed, and therefore not bound or loosed in heaven; as their ultimate resource, they answer, that the conferring of the keys must be taken with limitation, because Christ has promised that the sentence of the priest, properly pronounced, will be approved at his judgment-seat according as the bound or loosed asked what they merited. They say, moreover, that those keys which are conferred by bishops at ordination were given by Christ to all priests, but that the free use of them is with those only who discharge ecclesiastical functions; that with priests excommunicated or suspended the keys themselves indeed remain, but tied and rusty. Those who speak thus may justly be deemed modest and sober compared with others, who on a new anvil have forged new keys, by which they say that the treasury of heaven is locked up: these we shall afterwards consider in their own place, (chap. 5. sec. 2.)

16. To each of these views I will briefly reply. As to their binding the souls of believers by their laws, whether justly or unjustly, I say nothing at present, as it will be seen at the proper place; but their enacting it as a law, that all sins are to be enumerated; their denying that sin is

discharged except under the condition that the resolution to confess has been firmly conceived; their pretence that there is no admission into Paradise if the opportunity of confession has been neglected, are things which it is impossible to bear. Are all sins to be enumerated? But David, who, I presume, had honestly pondered with himself as to the confession of his sins, exclaimed, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults," (Ps. 19:12;) and in another passage, "Mine iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me," (Ps. 38:4.) He knew how deep was the abyss of our sins, how numerous the forms of wickedness, how many heads the hydra carried, how long a tail it drew. Therefore, he did not sit down to make a catalogue, but from the depth of his distress cried unto the Lord, "I am overwhelmed, and buried, and sore vexed; the gates of hell have encircled me: let thy right hand deliver me from the abyss into which I am plunged, and from the death which I am ready to die." Who can now think of a computation of his sins when he sees David's inability to number his?

17. By this ruinous procedure, the souls of those who were affected with some sense of God have been most cruelly racked. First, they betook themselves to calculation, proceeding according to the formula given by the Schoolmen, and dividing their sins into boughs, branches, twigs, and leaves; then they weighed the qualities, quantities, and circumstances; and in this way, for some time, matters proceeded. But after they had advanced farther, when they looked around, nought was seen but sea and sky; no road, no harbour. The longer the space they ran over, a longer still met the eye; nay, lofty mountains began to rise, and there seemed no hope of escape; none at least till after long wanderings. They were thus brought to a dead halt, till at length the only issue was found in despair. Here these cruel murderers, to ease the wounds which they had made, applied certain fomentations. Every one was to do his best. But new cares again disturbed, nay, new torments excruciated their souls. "I have not spent enough of time; I have not exerted myself sufficiently: many things I have omitted through negligence: forgetfulness proceeding from want of care is not excusable." Then new drugs were supplied to alleviate their pains. "Repent of your negligence; and provided it is not done supinely, it will be pardoned." All these things, however, could not heal the wound, being not so much alleviations of the sore as poison besmeared with honey, that its bitterness might not at once offend the taste, but penetrate to the vitals before it could be detected. The dreadful voice, therefore, was always heard pealing in their ears, "Confess all your sins," and the dread thus occasioned could not be pacified without sure consolation. Here let my readers consider whether it be possible to take an account of the actions of a whole year, or even to collect the sins committed in a single day, seeing every man's experience convinces him that at evening, in examining the faults of that single day, memory gets confused, so great is the number and variety presented. I am not speaking of dull and heartless hypocrites, who, after animadverting on three or four of their grosser offences, think the work finished; but of the true worshippers of God, who, after they have performed their examination, feeling themselves overwhelmed, still add the words of John: "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things," (1 John 3:20;) and, therefore, tremble at the thought of that Judge whose knowledge far surpasses our comprehension.

18. Though a good part of the world rested in these soothing suggestions, by which this fatal poison was somewhat tempered, it was not because they thought that God was satisfied, or they had quite satisfied themselves; it was rather like an anchor cast out in the middle of the

deep, which for a little interrupts the navigation, or a weary, worn-out traveller, who lies down by the way. I give myself no trouble in proving the truth of this fact. Every one can be his own witness. I will mention generally what the nature of this law is. First, The observance of it is simply impossible; and hence its only result is to destroy, condemn, confound, to plunge into ruin and despair. Secondly, By withdrawing sinners from a true sense of their sins, it makes them hypocritical, and ignorant both of God and themselves. For, while they are wholly occupied with the enumeration of their sins, they lose sight of that lurking hydra, their secret iniquities and internal defilements, the knowledge of which would have made them sensible of their misery. But the surest rule of confession is, to acknowledge and confess our sins to be an abyss so great as to exceed our comprehension. On this rule we see the confession of the publican was formed, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," (Luke 18:13;) as if he had said, How great, how very great a sinner, how utterly sinful I am! the extent of my sins I can neither conceive nor express. Let the depth of thy mercy engulf the depth of sin! What! you will say, are we not to confess every single sin? Is no confession acceptable to God but that which is contained in the words, "I am a sinner"? Nay, our endeavour must rather be, as much as in us lies, to pour out our whole heart before the Lord. Nor are we only in one word to confess ourselves sinners, but truly and sincerely acknowledge ourselves as such; to feel with our whole soul how great and various the pollutions of our sins are; confessing not only that we are impure, but what the nature of our impurity is, its magnitude and its extent; not only that we are debtors, but what the debts are which burden us, and how they were incurred; not only that we are wounded, but how numerous and deadly are the wounds. When thus recognising himself, the sinner shall have poured out his whole heart before God, let him seriously and sincerely reflect that a greater number of sins still remains, and that their recesses are too deep for him thoroughly to penetrate. Accordingly, let him exclaim with David, "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults," (Ps. 19:12.) But when the Schoolmen affirm that sins are not forgiven, unless the resolution to confess has been firmly conceived, and that the gate of Paradise is closed on him who has neglected the opportunity of confessing when offered, far be it from us to concede this to them. The remission of sins is not different now from what it has ever been. In all the passages in which we read that sinners obtained forgiveness from God, we read not that they whispered into the ear of some priest. Indeed, they could not then confess, as priests were not then confessionaries, nor did the confessional itself exist. And for many ages afterwards, this mode of confession, by which sins were forgiven on this condition, was unheard of. But not to enter into a long discussion, as if the matter were doubtful, the word of God, which abideth for ever, is plain, "When the wicked shall turn away from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die," (Ezek. 18:21.) He who presumes to add to this declaration binds not sins, but the mercy of God. When they contend that judgment cannot be given unless the case is known, the answer is easy, that they usurp the right of judging, being only self-created judges. And it is strange, how confidently they lay down principles, which no man of sound mind will admit. They give out, that the office of binding and loosing has been committed to them, as a kind of jurisdiction annexed to the right of inquiry. That the jurisdiction was unknown to the Apostles their whole doctrine proclaims. Nor does it belong to the priest to know for certainty whether or not a sinner is loosed, but to Him from whom acquittal is asked; since he who only hears can ever know whether or not the enumeration is

full and complete. Thus there would be no absolution, without restricting it to the words of him who is to be judged. We may add, that the whole system of loosing depends on faith and repentance, two things which no man can know of another, so as to pronounce sentence. It follows, therefore, that the certainty of binding and loosing is not subjected to the will of an earthly judge, because the minister of the word, when he duly executes his office, can only acquit conditionally, when, for the sake of the sinner, he repeats the words, "Whose soever sins ye remit;" lest he should doubt of the pardon, which, by the command and voice of God, is promised to be ratified in heaven.

19. It is not strange, therefore, that we condemn that auricular confession, as a thing pestilent in its nature, and in many ways injurious to the Church, and desire to see it abolished. But if the thing were in itself indifferent, yet, seeing it is of no use or benefit, and has given occasion to so much impiety, blasphemy, and error, who does not think that it ought to be immediately abolished? They enumerate some of its uses, and boast of them as very beneficial, but they are either fictitious or of no importance. One thing they specially commend, that the blush of shame in the penitent is a severe punishment, which makes him more cautious for the future, and anticipates divine punishment, by his punishing himself. As if a man was not sufficiently humbled with shame when brought under the cognisance of God at his supreme tribunal. Admirable proficiency—if we cease to sin because we are ashamed to make one man acquainted with it, and blush not at having God as the witness of our evil conscience! The assertion, however, as to the effect of shame, is most unfounded, for we may every where see, that there is nothing which gives men greater confidence and license in sinning than the idea, that after making confession to priests, they can *wipe their lips and say, I have not done it*. And not only do they during the whole year become bolder in sin, but, secure against confession for the remainder of it, they never sigh after God, never examine themselves, but continue heaping sins upon sins, until, as they suppose, they get rid of them all at once. And when they have got rid of them, they think they are disburdened of their load, and imagine they have deprived God of the right of judging, by giving it to the priest; have made God forgetful, by making the priest conscious. Moreover, who is glad when he sees the day of confession approaching? Who goes with a cheerful mind to confess, and does not rather, as if he were dragged to prison with a rope about his neck, go unwillingly, and, as it were, struggling against it? with the exception, perhaps, of the priests themselves, who take a fond delight in the mutual narrative of their own misdeeds, as a kind of merry tales. I will not pollute my page by retailing the monstrous abominations with which auricular confession teems; I only say, that if that holy man (Nectarius, of whom *supra*, sec. 7) did not act unadvisedly, when for one rumour of whoredom he banished confession from his church, or rather from the memory of his people, the innumerable acts of prostitution, adultery, and incest, which it produces in the present day, warn us of the necessity of abolishing it.

20. As to the pretence of the confessionaries respecting the power of the keys, and their placing in it, so to speak, the sum and substance of their kingdom, we must see what force it ought to have. Were the keys, then, (they ask,) given without a cause? Was it said without a cause, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven?" (Matth. 18:18.) Do we make void the word of Christ? I answer, that there was a weighty reason for giving the keys, as I lately explained, and will again show at greater length when I come to treat of Excommunication, (Book IV. cap. 12.) But



what if I should cut off the handle for all such questions with one sword, viz., that priests are neither vicars nor successors of the Apostles? But that also will be elsewhere considered, (Book IV. 6.) Now, at the very place where they are most desirous to fortify themselves, they erect a battering-ram, by which all their own machinations are overthrown. Christ did not give his Apostles the power of binding and loosing before he endued them with the Holy Spirit. I deny, therefore, that any man, who has not previously received the Holy Spirit, is competent to possess the power of the keys. I deny that any one can use the keys, unless the Holy Spirit precede, teaching and dictating what is to be done. They pretend, indeed, that they have the Holy Spirit, but by their works deny him; unless, indeed, we are to suppose that the Holy Spirit is some vain thing of no value, as they certainly do feign, but we will not believe them. With this engine they are completely overthrown; whatever be the door of which they boast of having the key, we must always ask, whether they have the Holy Spirit, who is arbiter and ruler of the keys? If they reply, that they have, we must again ask, whether the Holy Spirit can err? This they will not venture to say distinctly, although by their doctrine they indirectly insinuate it. Therefore, we must infer, that no priestlings have the power of the keys, because they every where and indiscriminately loose what the Lord was pleased should be bound, and bind what he has ordered to be loosed.

21. When they see themselves convicted on the clearest evidence, of loosing and binding worthy and unworthy without distinction, they lay claim to power without knowledge. And although they dare not deny that knowledge is requisite for the proper use, they still affirm that the power itself has been given to bad administrators. This, however, is the power, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Either the promise of Christ must be false, or those who are endued with this power bind and loose properly. There is no room for the evasion, that the words of Christ are limited, according to the merits of him who is loosed or bound. We admit, that none can be bound or loosed but those who are worthy of being bound or loosed. But the preachers of the Gospel and the Church have the word by which they can measure this worthiness. By this word preachers of the Gospel can promise forgiveness of sins to all who are in Christ by faith, and can declare a sentence of condemnation against all, and upon all, who do not embrace Christ. In this word the Church declares, that "neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers," "nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God," (1 Cor. 6:9, 10.) Such it binds in sure fetters. By the same word it looses and consoles the penitent. But what kind of power is it which knows not what is to be bound or loosed? You cannot bind or loose without knowledge. Why, then, do they say, that they absolve by authority given to them, when absolution is uncertain? As regards us, this power is merely imaginary, if it cannot be used. Now, I hold, either that there is no use, or one so uncertain as to be virtually no use at all. For when they confess that a good part of the priests do not use the keys duly, and that power without the legitimate use is ineffectual, who is to assure me, that the one by whom I am loosed is a good dispenser of the keys? But if he is a bad one, what better has he given me than this nugatory dispensation,—What is to be bound or loosed in you I know not, since I have not the proper use of the keys; but if you deserve it, I absolve you? As much might be done, I say not by a laic, (since they would scarcely listen to such a statement,) but by the Turk or the devil. For it is just to say, I have not the word of God, the sure rule for loosing, but authority has been given me to absolve you, if you deserve it. We

see, therefore, what their object was, when they defined (see sec. 16) the keys as authority to discern and power to execute; and said, that knowledge is added as a counsellor, and counsels the proper use; their object was to reign libidiously and licentiously, without God and his word.

22. Should any one object, first, that the lawful ministers of Christ will be no less perplexed in the discharge of their duty, because the absolution, which depends on faith, will always be equivocal; and, secondly, that sinners will receive no comfort at all, or cold comfort, because the minister, who is not a fit judge of their faith, is not certain of their absolution, we are prepared with an answer. They say that no sins are remitted by the priest, but such sins as he is cognizant of; thus, according to them, remission depends on the judgment of the priest, and unless he accurately discriminate as to who are worthy of pardon, the whole procedure is null and void. In short, the power of which they speak is a jurisdiction annexed to examination, to which pardon and absolution are restricted. Here no firm footing can be found, nay, there is a profound abyss; because, where confession is not complete, the hope of pardon also is defective; next, the priest himself must necessarily remain in suspense, while he knows not whether the sinner gives a faithful enumeration of his sins; lastly, such is the rudeness and ignorance of priests, that the greater part of them are in no respect fitter to perform this office than a cobbler to cultivate the fields, while almost all the others have good reason to suspect their own fitness. Hence the perplexity and doubt as to the Popish absolution, from their choosing to found it on the person of the priest, and not on his person only, but on his knowledge, so that he can only judge of what is laid before him, investigated, and ascertained. Now, if any should ask at these good doctors, Whether the sinner is reconciled to God when some sins are remitted? I know not what answer they could give, unless that they should be forced to confess, that whatever the priest pronounces with regard to the remission of sins which have been enumerated to him will be unavailing, so long as others are not exempted from condemnation. On the part of the penitent, again, it is hence obvious in what a state of pernicious anxiety his conscience will be held; because, while he leans on what they call the discernment of the priest, he cannot come to any decision from the word of God. From all these absurdities the doctrine which we deliver is completely free. For absolution is conditional, allowing the sinner to trust that God is propitious to him, provided he sincerely seek expiation in the sacrifice of Christ, and accept of the grace offered to him. Thus, he cannot err who, in the capacity of a herald, promulgates what has been dictated to him from the word of God. The sinner, again, can receive a clear and sure absolution when, in regard to embracing the grace of Christ, the simple condition annexed is in terms of the general rule of our Master himself,—a rule impiously spurned by the Papacy,—“According to your faith be it unto you,” (Matth. 9:29.)

23. The absurd jargon which they make of the doctrine of Scripture concerning the power of the keys, I have promised to expose elsewhere; the proper place will be in treating of the Government of the Church, (Book IV. c. 12.) Meanwhile, let the reader remember how absurdly they wrest to auricular and secret confession what was said by Christ partly of the preaching of the Gospel, and partly of excommunication. Wherefore, when they object that the power of loosing was given to the Apostles, and that this power priests exercise by remitting sins acknowledged to them, it is plain that the principle which they assume is false and frivolous: for the absolution which is subordinate to faith is nothing else than an evidence of pardon, derived from the free promise of the Gospel, while the other absolution, which depends on the

discipline of the Church, has nothing to do with secret sins; but is more a matter of example for the purpose of removing the public offence given to the Church. As to their diligence in searching up and down for passages by which they may prove that it is not sufficient to confess sins to God alone, or to laymen, unless the priest take cognizance, it is vile and disgraceful. For when the ancient fathers advise sinners to disburden themselves to their pastor, we cannot understand them to refer to a recital which was not then in use. Then, so unfair are Lombard and others like-minded, that they seem intentionally to have devoted themselves to spurious books, that they might use them as a cloak to deceive the simple. They, indeed, acknowledge truly, that as forgiveness always accompanies repentance, no obstacle properly remains after the individual is truly penitent, though he may not have actually confessed; and, therefore, that the priest does not so much remit sins, as pronounce and declare that they are remitted; though in the term *declaring*, they insinuate a gross error, surrogating ceremony in place of doctrine. But in pretending that he who has already obtained pardon before God is acquitted in the face of the Church, they unseasonably apply to the special use of every individual, that which we have already said was designed for common discipline when the offence of a more heinous and notorious transgression was to be removed. Shortly after they pervert and destroy their previous moderation, by adding that there is another mode of remission, namely, by the infliction of penalty and satisfaction, in which they arrogate to their priests the right of dividing what God has every where promised to us entire. While He simply requires repentance and faith, their division or exception is altogether blasphemous. For it is just as if the priest, assuming the office of tribune, were to interfere with God, and try to prevent him from admitting to his favour by his mere liberality any one who had not previously lain prostrate at the tribunical bench, and there been punished.

24. The whole comes to this, when they wish to make God the author of this fictitious confession their vanity is proved, as I have shown their falsehood in expounding the few passages which they cite. But while it is plain, that the law was imposed by men, I say that it is both tyrannical and insulting to God, who, in binding consciences to his word, would have them free from human rule. Then when confession is prescribed as necessary to obtain pardon, which God wished to be free, I say that the sacrilege is altogether intolerable, because nothing belongs more peculiarly to God than the forgiveness of sins, in which our salvation consists. I have, moreover, shown that this tyranny was introduced when the world was sunk in shameful barbarism. Besides, I have proved that the law is pestiferous, inasmuch as when the fear of God exists, it plunges men into despair, and when there is security soothing itself with vain flattery, it blunts it the more. Lastly, I have explained that all the mitigations which they employ have no other tendency than to entangle, obscure, and corrupt the pure doctrine, and cloak their iniquities with deceitful colours.

25. In repentance they assign the third place to satisfaction, all their absurd talk as to which can be refuted in one word. They say, that it is not sufficient for the penitent to abstain from past sins, and change his conduct for the better, unless he satisfy God for what he has done; and that there are many helps by which we may redeem sins, such as tears, fastings, oblations,<sup>3</sup> and offices of charity; that by them the Lord is to be propitiated; by them the debts due to divine justice are to be paid; by them our faults are to be compensated; by them pardon is to be deserved: for though in the riches of his mercy he has forgiven the guilt, he yet, as a just discipline, retains the penalty, and that this penalty must be bought off by satisfaction. The sum

of the whole comes to this: that we indeed obtain pardon of our sins from the mercy of God, but still by the intervention of the merit of works, by which the evil of our sins is compensated, and due satisfaction made to divine justice. To such false views I oppose the free forgiveness of sins, one of the doctrines most clearly taught in Scripture. First, what is forgiveness but a gift of mere liberality? A creditor is not said to forgive when he declares by granting a discharge, that the money has been paid to him; but when, without any payment, through voluntary kindness, he expunges the debt. And why is the term *gratis* (free) afterwards added, but to take away all idea of satisfaction? With what confidence, then, do they still set up their satisfactions, which are thus struck down as with a thunderbolt? What? When the Lord proclaims by Isaiah, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins," does he not plainly declare, that the cause and foundation of forgiveness is to be sought from his goodness alone? Besides, when the whole of Scripture bears this testimony to Christ, that through his name the forgiveness of sins is to be obtained, (Acts 10:43,) does it not plainly exclude all other names? How then do they teach that it is obtained by the name of satisfaction? Let them not deny that they attribute this to satisfactions, though they bring them in as subsidiary aids. For when Scripture says, *by the name of Christ*, it means, that we are to bring nothing, pretend nothing of our own, but lean entirely on the recommendation of Christ. Thus Paul, after declaring that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," immediately adds the reason and the method, "For he hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin," (2 Cor. 5:19, 20.)

26. But with their usual perverseness, they maintain that both the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation take place at once when we are received into the favour of God through Christ in baptism; that in lapses after baptism we must rise again by means of satisfactions; that the blood of Christ is of no avail unless in so far as it is dispensed by the keys of the Church. I speak not of a matter as to which there can be any doubt; for this impious dogma is declared in the plainest terms, in the writings not of one or two, but of the whole Schoolmen. Their master, (Sent. Lib. iii. Dist. 9,) after acknowledging, according to the doctrine of Peter, that Christ "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," (1 Pet. 2:24,) immediately modifies the doctrine by introducing the exception, that in baptism all the temporal penalties of sin are relaxed; but that after baptism they are lessened by means of repentance, the cross of Christ and our repentance thus co-operating together. St John speaks very differently, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins." "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake," (1 John 2:1, 2, 12.) He certainly is addressing believers, and while setting forth Christ as the propitiation for sins, shows them that there is no other satisfaction by which an offended God can be propitiated or appeased. He says not: God was once reconciled to you by Christ; now, seek other methods; but he makes him a perpetual advocate, who always, by his intercession, reinstates us in his Father's favour—a perpetual propitiation by which sins are expiated. For what was said by another John will ever hold true, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world," (John 1:29.) He, I say, takes them away, and no other; that is, since he alone is the Lamb of God, he alone is the offering for our sins; he alone is expiation; he alone is satisfaction. For though the right and power of pardoning properly belongs to the Father, when he is distinguished from the Son, as has already been seen, Christ is here exhibited in another view, as transferring to himself the punishment due to us, and wiping away our guilt in the sight

of God. Whence it follows, that we could not be partakers of the expiation accomplished by Christ, were he not possessed of that honour of which those who try to appease God by their compensations seek to rob him.

27. Here it is necessary to keep two things in view: that the honour of Christ be preserved entire and unimpaired, and that the conscience, assured of the pardon of sin, may have peace with God. Isaiah says that the Father “hath laid on him the iniquity of us all;” that “with his stripes we are healed,” (Isa. 53:5, 6.) Peter repeating the same thing, in other words says, that he “bare our sins in his own body on the tree,” (1 Pet. 2:24.) Paul’s words are, “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh,” “being made a curse for us,” (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:13;) in other words, the power and curse of sin was destroyed in his flesh when he was offered as a sacrifice, on which the whole weight of our sins was laid, with their curse and execration, with the fearful judgment of God, and condemnation to death. Here there is no mention of the vain dogma, that after the initial cleansing no man experiences the efficacy of Christ’s passion in any other way than by means of satisfying penance: we are directed to the satisfaction of Christ alone for every fall. Now call to mind their pestilential dogma: that the grace of God is effective only in the first forgiveness of sins; but if we afterwards fall, our works co-operate in obtaining the second pardon. If these things are so, do the properties above attributed to Christ remain entire? How immense the difference between the two propositions—that our iniquities were laid upon Christ, that in his own person he might expiate them, and that they are expiated by our works; that Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and that God is to be propitiated by works. Then, in regard to pacifying the conscience, what pacification will it be to be told that sins are redeemed by satisfactions? How will it be able to ascertain the measure of satisfaction? It will always doubt whether God is propitious; will always fluctuate, always tremble. Those who rest satisfied with petty satisfactions form too contemptible an estimate of the justice of God, and little consider the grievous heinousness of sin, as shall afterwards be shown. Even were we to grant that they can buy off some sins by due satisfaction, still what will they do while they are overwhelmed with so many sins, that not even a hundred lives, though wholly devoted to the purpose, could suffice to satisfy for them? We may add, that all the passages in which the forgiveness of sins is declared refer not only to catechumens, but to the regenerate children of God; to those who have long been nursed in the bosom of the Church. That embassy which Paul so highly extols, “we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God,” (2 Cor. 5:20,) is not directed to strangers, but to those who had been regenerated long before. Setting satisfactions altogether aside, he directs us to the cross of Christ. Thus when he writes to the Colossians that Christ had “made peace through the blood of his cross,” “to reconcile all things unto himself,” he does not restrict it to the moment at which we are received into the Church, but extends it to our whole course. This is plain from the context, where he says that in him “we have redemption by his blood, even the forgiveness of sins,” (Col. 1:14.) It is needless to collect more passages, as they are ever occurring.

28. Here they take refuge in the absurd distinction that some sins are *venial*, and others *mortal*; that for the latter a weighty satisfaction is due, but that the former are purged by easier remedies; by the Lord’s Prayer, the sprinkling of holy water, and the absolution of the Mass. Thus they insult and trifle with God. And yet, though they have the terms venial and mortal sin continually in their mouth, they have not yet been able to distinguish the one from the other, except by making impiety and impurity of heart<sup>3</sup> to be venial sin. We, on the contrary, taught by

the Scripture standard of righteousness and unrighteousness, declare that “the wages of sin is death;” and that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die,” (Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:20.) The sins of believers are venial, not because they do not merit death, but because by the mercy of God there is “now no condemnation to those which are in Christ Jesus,” their sin being not imputed, but effaced by pardon. I know how unjustly they calumniate this our doctrine; for they say it is the paradox of the Stoics concerning the equality of sins: but we shall easily convict them out of their own mouths. I ask them whether, among those sins which they hold to be mortal, they acknowledge a greater and a less? If so, it cannot follow, as a matter of course, that all sins which are mortal are equal. Since Scripture declares that the wages of sin is death,—that obedience to the law is the way to life,—the transgression of it the way to death,—they cannot evade this conclusion. In such a mass of sins, therefore, how will they find an end to their satisfactions? If the satisfaction for one sin requires one day, while preparing it they involve themselves in more sins; since no man, however righteous, passes one day without falling repeatedly. While they prepare themselves for their satisfactions, number, or rather numbers without number, will be added. Confidence in satisfaction being thus destroyed, what more would they have? how do they still dare to think of satisfying?

29. They endeavour, indeed, to disentangle themselves, but it is impossible. They pretend a distinction between penalty and guilt, holding that the guilt is forgiven by the mercy of God; but that though the guilt is remitted, the punishment which divine justice requires to be paid remains. Satisfactions then properly relate to the remission of the penalty. How ridiculous this levity! They now confess that the remission of guilt is gratuitous; and yet they are ever and anon telling us to merit it by prayers and tears, and other preparations of every kind. Still the whole doctrine of Scripture regarding the remission of sins is diametrically opposed to that distinction. But although I think I have already done more than enough to establish this, I will subjoin some other passages, by which these slippery snakes will be so caught as to be afterwards unable to writhe even the tip of their tail: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more,” (Jer. 31:31, 34.) What this means we learn from another Prophet, when the Lord says, “When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness,” “all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned.” “Again, when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive,” (Ezek. 18:24, 27.) When he declares that he will not remember righteousness, the meaning is, that he will take no account of it to reward it. In the same way, not to remember sins is not to bring them to punishment. The same thing is denoted in other passages, by casting them behind his back, blotting them out as a cloud, casting them into the depths of the sea, not imputing them, hiding them. By such forms of expression the Holy Spirit has explained his meaning not obscurely, if we would lend a willing ear. Certainly if God punishes sins, he imputes them; if he avenges, he remembers; if he brings them to judgment, he has not hid them; if he examines, he has not cast them behind his back; if he investigates, he has not blotted them out like a cloud; if he exposes them, he has not thrown them into the depths of the sea. In this way Augustine clearly interprets: “If God has covered sins, he willed not to advert to them; if he willed not to advert, he willed not to animadvert; if he willed not to animadvert, he willed not to punish: he willed not to take knowledge of them, he rather willed to pardon them. Why then did he say that sins were hid? Just that they might

not be seen. What is meant by God seeing sins but punishing them?" (August. in Ps. 32:1.) But let us hear from another prophetic passage on what terms the Lord forgives sins: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," (Isa. 1:18.) In Jeremiah again we read: "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve," (Jer. 50:20.) Would you briefly comprehend the meaning of these words? Consider what, on the contrary, is meant by these expressions, "that transgression is sealed up in a bag;" "that the iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hid;" that "the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond." If they mean, as they certainly do, that vengeance will be recompensed, there can be no doubt that, by the contrary passages, the Lord declares that he renounces all thought of vengeance. Here I must entreat the reader not to listen to any glosses of mine, but only to give some deference to the word of God.

30. What, pray, did Christ perform for us if the punishment of sin is still exacted? For when we say that he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree," (1 Pet. 2:24,) all we mean is, that he endured the penalty and punishment which was due to our sins. This is more significantly declared by Isaiah, when he says that the "chastisement (or correction) of our peace was upon him," (Isaiah 53:5.) But what is the correction of our peace, unless it be the punishment due to our sins, and to be paid by us before we could be reconciled to God, had he not become our substitute? Thus you clearly see that Christ bore the punishment of sin that he might thereby exempt his people from it. And whenever Paul makes mention of the redemption procured by him, he calls it ἀπολύτρωσις, by which he does not simply mean *redemption*, as it is commonly understood, but the very *price* and satisfaction of redemption. For which reason, he also says, that Christ gave himself an ἀντίλυτρον (ransom) for us. "What is propitiation with the Lord (says Augustine) but sacrifice? And what is sacrifice but that which was offered for us in the death of Christ?" But we have our strongest argument in the injunctions of the Mosaic Law as to expiating the guilt of sin. The Lord does not there appoint this or that method of satisfying, but requires the whole compensation to be made by sacrifice, though he at the same time enumerates all the rites of expiation with the greatest care and exactness. How comes it that he does not at all enjoin works as the means of procuring pardon, but only requires sacrifices for expiation, unless it were his purpose thus to testify that this is the only kind of satisfaction by which his justice is appeased? For the sacrifices which the Israelites then offered were not regarded as human works, but were estimated by their antitype, that is, the sole sacrifice of Christ. The kind of compensation which the Lord receives from us is elegantly and briefly expressed by Hosea: "Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously," here is remission: "so will we render the calves of our lips," here is satisfaction, (Hos. 14:2.) I know that they have still a more subtle evasion, by making a distinction between eternal and temporal punishment; but as they define temporal punishment to be any kind of infliction with which God visits either the body or the soul, eternal death only excepted, this restriction avails them little. The passages which we have quoted above say expressly that the terms on which God receives us into favour are these, viz., he remits all the punishment which we deserved by pardoning our guilt. And whenever David or the other prophets ask pardon for their sins, they deprecate punishment. Nay, a sense of the divine justice impels them to this. On the other hand, when they promise mercy from the Lord, they

almost always discourse of punishments and the forgiveness of them. Assuredly, when the Lord declares in Ezekiel, that he will put an end to the Babylonish captivity, not “for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name’s sake,” (Ezek. 36:22,) he sufficiently demonstrates that both are gratuitous. In short, if we are freed from guilt by Christ, the punishment consequent upon guilt must cease with it.

31. But since they also arm themselves with passages of Scripture, let us see what the arguments are which they employ. David, they say, when upbraided by Nathan the Prophet for adultery and murder, receives pardon of the sin, and yet by the death of the son born of adultery is afterwards punished, (2 Sam. 12:13, 14.) Such punishments, which were to be inflicted after the remission of the guilt, we are taught to ransom by satisfactions. For Daniel exhorted Nebuchadnezzar: “Break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor,” (Dan. 4:27.) And Solomon says, “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged,” (Prov. 16:6;) and again, “love covereth all sins,” (Prov. 10:12.) This sentiment is confirmed by Peter, (1 Pet. 4:8.) Also in Luke, our Lord says of the woman that was a sinner, “Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much,” (Luke 7:47.) How perverse and preposterous the judgment they ever form of the doings of God! Had they observed, what certainly they ought not to have overlooked, that there are two kinds of divine judgment, they would have seen in the correction of David a very different form of punishment from that which must be thought designed for vengeance. But since it in no slight degree concerns us to understand the purpose of God in the chastisements by which he animadverts upon our sins, and how much they differ from the exemplary punishments which he indignantly inflicts on the wicked and reprobate, I think it will not be improper briefly to glance at it. For the sake of distinction, we may call the one kind of judgment *punishment*, the other *chastisement*. In judicial punishment, God is to be understood as taking vengeance on his enemies, by displaying his anger against them, confounding, scattering, and annihilating them. By divine punishment, properly so called, let us then understand punishment accompanied with indignation. In judicial chastisement, he is offended, but not in wrath; he does not punish by destroying or striking down as with a thunderbolt. Hence it is not properly punishment or vengeance, but correction and admonition. The one is the act of a judge, the other of a father. When the judge punishes a criminal, he animadverts upon the crime, and demands the penalty. When a father corrects his son sharply, it is not to mulct or avenge, but rather to teach him, and make him more cautious for the future. Chrysostom in his writings employs a simile which is somewhat different, but the same in purport. He says, “A son is whipt, and a slave is whipt, but the latter is punished as a slave for his offence: the former is chastised as a free-born son, standing in need of correction.” The correction of the latter is designed to prove and amend him; that of the former is scourging and punishment.

32. To have a short and clear view of the whole matter, we must make two distinctions. First, whenever the infliction is designed to avenge, then the curse and wrath of God displays itself. This is never the case with believers. On the contrary, the chastening of God carries his blessing with it, and is an evidence of love, as Scripture teaches. This distinction is plainly marked throughout the word of God. All the calamities which the wicked suffer in the present life are depicted to us as a kind of anticipation of the punishment of hell. In these they already see, as from a distance, their eternal condemnation; and so far are they from being thereby reformed, or deriving any benefit, that by such preludes they are rather prepared for the fearful



doom which finally awaits them. The Lord chastens his servants sore, but does not give them over unto death, (Ps. 118:18.) When afflicted, they acknowledge it is good for them, that they may learn his statutes, (Ps. 119:71.) But as we everywhere read that the saints received their chastisements with placid mind, so inflictions of the latter kind they always most earnestly deprecated. "O Lord, correct me," says Jeremiah, "but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing. Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name," (Jer. 10:24, 25.) David says, "O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure," (Ps. 6:1.) There is nothing inconsistent with this in its being repeatedly said, that the Lord is angry with his saints when he chastens them for their sins, (Ps. 38:7.) In like manner, in Isaiah, "And in that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me," (Isa. 12:1.) Likewise in Habakkuk, "In wrath remember mercy," (Hab. 3:2;) and in Micah, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him," (Mic. 7:9.) Here we are reminded not only that those who are justly punished gain nothing by murmuring, but that believers obtain a mitigation of their pain by reflecting on the divine intention. For the same reason, he is said to profane his inheritance; and yet we know that he will never profane it. The expression refers not to the counsel or purpose of God in punishing, but to the keen sense of pain, endured by those who are visited with any measure of divine severity. For the Lord not only chastens his people with a slight degree of austerity, but sometimes so wounds them, that they seem to themselves on the very eve of perdition. He thus declares that they have deserved his anger, and it is fitting so to do, that they may be dissatisfied with themselves for their sins, may be more careful in their desires to appease God, and anxiously hasten to seek his pardon; still, at this very time, he gives clearer evidence of his mercy than of his anger. For He who cannot deceive has declared, that the covenant made with us in our true Solomon stands fast and will never be broken, "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail," (Ps. 89:31–34.) To assure us of this mercy, he says, that the *rod* with which he will chastise the posterity of Solomon will be the "rod of men," and "the stripes of the children of men," (2 Sam. 7:14.) While by these terms he denotes moderation and lenity, he, at the same time, intimates, that those who feel the hand of God opposed to them cannot but tremble and be confounded. How much regard he has to this lenity in chastening his Israel he shows by the Prophet, "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction," (Isa. 48:10.) Although he tells them that they are chastisements with a view to purification, he adds, that even these are so tempered, that they are not to be too much crushed by them. And this is very necessary, for the more a man reveres God, and devotes himself to the cultivation of piety, the more tender he is in bearing his anger, (Ps. 90:11; and *ibid.* Calv.) The reprobate, though they groan under the lash, yet, because they weigh not the true cause, but rather turn their back, as well upon their sins as upon the divine judgment, become hardened in their stupor; or, because they murmur and kick, and so rebel against their judge, their infatuated violence fills them with frenzy and madness. Believers, again, admonished by the rod of God, immediately begin to reflect on their sins, and, struck with fear and dread, betake themselves as suppliants to

implore mercy. Did not God mitigate the pains by which wretched souls are excruciated, they would give way a hundred times, even at slight signs of his anger.

33. The second distinction is, that when the reprobate are brought under the lash of God, they begin in a manner to pay the punishment due to his justice; and though their refusal to listen to these proofs of the divine anger will not escape with impunity, still they are not punished with the view of bringing them to a better mind, but only to teach them by dire experience that God is a judge and avenger. The sons of God are beaten with rods, not that they may pay the punishment due to their faults, but that they may thereby be led to repent. Accordingly, we perceive that they have more respect to the future than to the past. I prefer giving this in the words of Chrysostom rather than my own: "His object in imposing a penalty upon us, is not to inflict punishment on our sins, but to correct us for the future," (Chrysost. Serm. de Pœnit. et Confess.) So also Augustine, "The suffering at which you cry, is medicine, not punishment; chastisement, not condemnation. Do not drive away the rod, if you would not be driven away from the inheritance. Know, brethren, that the whole of that misery of the human race, under which the world groans, is a medicinal pain, not a penal sentence," (August. in Psal. 102 circa finem.) It seemed proper to quote these passages, lest any one should think the mode of expression which I have used to be novel or uncommon. To the same effect are the indignant terms in which the Lord expostulates with his people, for their ingratitude in obstinately despising all his inflictions. In Isaiah he says, "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint," (Isa. 1:5, 6.) But as such passages abound in the Prophets, it is sufficient briefly to have shown, that the only purpose of God in punishing his Church is to subdue her to repentance. Thus, when he rejected Saul from the kingdom, he punished in vengeance, (1 Sam. 15:23;) when he deprived David of his child, he chastised for amendment, (2 Sam. 12:18.) In this sense Paul is to be understood when he says, "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world," (1 Cor. 11:32;) that is, while we as sons of God are afflicted by our heavenly Father's hand, it is not punishment to confound, but only chastisement to train us. On this subject Augustine is plainly with us, (De Peccator. Meritis ac Remiss. Lib. ii. cap. 33, 34.) For he shows that the punishments with which men are equally chastened by God are to be variously considered; because the saints after the forgiveness of their sins have struggles and exercises, the reprobate without forgiveness are punished for their iniquity. Enumerating the punishments inflicted on David and other saints, he says, it was designed, by thus humbling them, to prove and exercise their piety. The passage in Isaiah, in which it is said, "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received of the Lord's hands double for all her sins," (Isa. 40:2,) proves not that the pardon of sin depends on freedom from punishment. It is just as if he had said, Sufficient punishment has now been exacted; as for their number and heinousness, you have long been oppressed with sorrow and mourning, it is time to send you a message of complete mercy, that your minds may be filled with joy on feeling me to be a Father. For God there assumes the character of a father who repents even of the just severity which he has been compelled to use towards his son.

34. These are the thoughts with which the believer ought to be provided in the bitterness of affliction, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God," "the city which is called by my name," (1 Pet. 4:17; Jer. 25:29.) What could the sons of God do, if they thought

that the severity which they feel was vengeance? He who, smitten by the hand of God, thinks that God is a judge inflicting punishment, cannot conceive of him except as angry and at enmity with him; cannot but detest the rod of God as curse and condemnation; in short, can never persuade himself that he is loved by God, while he feels that he is still disposed to inflict punishment upon him. He only profits under the divine chastening who considers that God, though offended with his sins, is still propitious and favourable to him. Otherwise, the feeling must necessarily be what the Psalmist complains that he had experienced, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves." Also what Moses says, "For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath we are troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told," (Ps. 90:7–9.) On the other hand, David, speaking of fatherly chastisements, to show how believers are more assisted than oppressed by them, thus sings, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law; that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked," (Ps. 94:12, 13.) It is certainly a sore temptation, when God, sparing unbelievers and overlooking their crimes, appears more rigid towards his own people. Hence, to solace them, he adds the admonition of the law which teaches them, that their salvation is consulted when they are brought back to the right path, whereas the wicked are borne headlong in their errors, which ultimately lead to the pit. It matters not whether the punishment is eternal or temporary. For disease, pestilence, famine, and war, are curses from God, as much as even the sentence of eternal death, whenever their tendency is to operate as instruments of divine wrath and vengeance against the reprobate.

35. All, if I mistake not, now see what view the Lord had in chastening David, namely, to prove that murder and adultery are most offensive to God, and to manifest this offensiveness in a beloved and faithful servant, that David himself might be taught never again to dare to commit such wickedness; still, however, it was not a punishment designed in payment of a kind of compensation to God. In the same way are we to judge of that other correction, in which the Lord subjects his people to a grievous pestilence, for the disobedience of David in forgetting himself so far as to number the people. He indeed freely forgave David the guilt of his sin; but because it was necessary, both as a public example to all ages and also to humble David himself, not to allow such an offence to go unpunished, he chastened him most sharply with his whip. We ought also to keep this in view in the universal curse of the human race. For since after obtaining grace we still continue to endure the miseries denounced to our first parent as the penalty of transgression, we ought thereby to be reminded, how offensive to God is the transgression of his law, that thus humbled and dejected by a consciousness of our wretched condition, we may aspire more ardently to true happiness. But it were most foolish in any one to imagine, that we are subjected to the calamities of the present life for the guilt of sin. This seems to me to have been Chrysostom's meaning when he said, "If the purpose of God in inflicting punishment is to bring those persisting in evil to repentance, when repentance is manifested punishment would be superfluous," (Chrysos. Homil. iii. de Provid.) Wherefore, as he knows what the disposition of each requires, he treats one with greater harshness, and another with more indulgence. Accordingly, when he wishes to show that he is not excessive in exacting punishment, he upbraids a hard-hearted and obstinate people, because, after being smitten, they still continued in sin, (Jer. 5:3.) In the same sense he complains, that "Ephraim is a

cake not turned," (Hos. 7:8,) because chastisement did not make a due impression on their minds, and, correcting their vices, make them fit to receive pardon. Surely he who thus speaks shows, that as soon as any one repents he will be ready to receive him, and that the rigour which he exercises in chastising faults is wrung from him by our perverseness, since we should prevent him by a voluntary correction. Such, however, being the hardness and rudeness of all hearts, that they stand universally in need of castigation, our infinitely wise Parent hath seen it meet to exercise all without exception, during their whole lives, with chastisement. It is strange how they fix their eyes so intently on the one example of David, and are not moved by the many examples in which they might have beheld the free forgiveness of sins. The publican is said to have gone down from the temple justified, (Luke 18:14;) no punishment follows. Peter obtained the pardon of his sin, (Luke 22:61.) "We read of his tears," says Ambrose, (Serm. 46, De Pœnit. Petri,) "we read not of satisfaction." To the paralytic it is said, "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee," (Matth. 9:2;) no penance is enjoined. All the acts of forgiveness mentioned in Scripture are gratuitous. The rule ought to be drawn from these numerous examples, rather than from one example which contains a kind of specialty.

36. Daniel, in exhorting Nebuchadnezzar to break off his sins by righteousness, and his iniquities by showing mercy to the poor, (Dan. 4:27,) meant not to intimate, that righteousness and mercy are able to propitiate God and redeem from punishment, (far be it from us to suppose that there ever was any other ἀπολύτρωσις (*ransom*) than the blood of Christ;) but the breaking off referred to in that passage has reference to man rather than to God: as if he had said, O king, you have exercised an unjust and violent domination, you have oppressed the humble, spoiled the poor, treated your people harshly and unjustly; instead of unjust exaction, instead of violence and oppression, now practise mercy and justice. In like manner, Solomon says, that love covers a multitude of sins; not, however, with God, but among men. For the whole verse stands thus, "Hatred stirreth up strifes; but love covereth all sins," (Prov. 10:12.) Here, after his manner, he contrasts the evils produced by hatred with the fruits of charity, in this sense, Those who hate are incessantly biting, carping at, upbraiding, lacerating each other, making every thing a fault; but those who love mutually conceal each other's faults, wink at many, forgive many: not that the one approves the vices of the other, but tolerates and cures by admonishing, rather than exasperates by assailing. That the passage is quoted by Peter (1 Pet. 4:8) in the same sense we cannot doubt, unless we would charge him with corrupting or craftily wresting Scripture. When it is said, that "by mercy and truth iniquity is purged," (Prov. 16:6,) the meaning is, not that by them compensation is made to the Lord, so that he being thus satisfied remits the punishment which he would otherwise have exacted; but intimation is made after the familiar manner of Scripture, that those who, forsaking their vices and iniquities, turn to the Lord in truth and piety, will find him propitious: as if he had said, that the wrath of God is calmed, and his judgment is at rest, whenever we rest from our wickedness. But, indeed, it is not the cause of pardon that is described, but rather the mode of true conversion; just as the Prophets frequently declare, that it is in vain for hypocrites to offer God fictitious rites instead of repentance, seeing his delight is in integrity and the duties of charity. In like manner, also, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, commending kindness and humanity, reminds us, that "with such sacrifices God is well pleased," (Heb. 13:16.) And indeed when Christ, rebuking the Pharisees because, intent merely on the outside of the cup and platter, they neglected purity of heart, enjoins them, in order that they may be clean in all respects, to give

alms, does he exhort them to give satisfaction thereby? He only tells them what the kind of purity is which God requires. Of this mode of expression we have treated elsewhere, (Matth. 23:25; Luke 11:39–41; see Calv. in Harm. Evang.)

37. In regard to the passage in Luke, (Luke 7:36, sq.) no man of sober judgment, who reads the parable there employed by our Lord, will raise any controversy with us. The Pharisee thought that the Lord did not know the character of the woman whom he had so easily admitted to his presence. For he presumed that he would not have admitted her if he had known what kind of a sinner she was; and from this he inferred, that one who could be deceived in this way was not a prophet. Our Lord, to show that she was not a sinner, inasmuch as she had already been forgiven, spake this parable: "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? The Pharisee answers: "I suppose that he to whom he forgave most." Then our Saviour rejoins: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much." By these words it is plain he does not make love the cause of forgiveness, but the proof of it. The similitude is borrowed from the case of a debtor, to whom a debt of five hundred pence had been forgiven. It is not said that the debt is forgiven because he loved much, but that he loved much because it was forgiven. The similitude ought to be applied in this way: You think this woman is a sinner; but you ought to have acknowledged her as not a sinner, in respect that her sins have been forgiven her. Her love ought to have been to you a proof of her having obtained forgiveness, that love being an expression of gratitude for the benefit received. It is an argument *a posteriori*, by which something is demonstrated by the results produced by it. Our Lord plainly attests the ground on which she had obtained forgiveness, when he says, "Thy faith hath saved thee." By faith, therefore, we obtain forgiveness: by love we give thanks, and bear testimony to the loving-kindness of the Lord.

38. I am little moved by the numerous passages in the writings of the Fathers relating to satisfaction. I see indeed that some (I will frankly say almost all whose books are extant) have either erred in this matter, or spoken too roughly and harshly; but I cannot admit that they were so rude and unskilful as to write these passages in the sense in which they are read by our new satisfactionaries. Chrysostom somewhere says, "When mercy is implored, interrogation ceases; when mercy is asked, judgment rages not; when mercy is sought, there is no room for punishment; where there is mercy, no question is asked; where there is mercy, the answer gives pardon," (Chrysos. Hom. ii. in Psal. 50.) How much soever these words may be twisted, they can never be reconciled with the dogmas of the Schoolmen. In the book *De Dogmatibus Ecclesiasticis*, which is attributed to Augustine, you read, (cap. 54,) "The satisfaction of repentance is to cut off the causes of sins, and not to indulge an entrance to their suggestions." From this it appears that the doctrine of satisfaction, said to be paid for sins committed, was every where derided in those ages; for here the only satisfaction referred to is caution, abstinence from sin for the future. I am unwilling to quote what Chrysostom says, (Hom. x. in Genes.) that God requires nothing more of us than to confess our faults before him with tears, as similar sentiments abound both in his writings and those of others. Augustine indeed calls works of mercy remedies for obtaining forgiveness of sins, (Enchir. ad Laur. ;) but lest any one should stumble at the expression, he himself, in another passage, obviates the difficulty. "The flesh of Christ," says he, "is the true and only sacrifice for sins—not only for those which are all

effaced in baptism, but those into which we are afterwards betrayed through infirmity, and because of which the whole Church daily cries, 'Forgive us our debts,' (Matth. 6:12.) And they are forgiven by that special sacrifice."

39. By satisfaction, however, they, for the most part, meant not compensation to be paid to God, but the public testimony, by which those who had been punished with excommunication, and wished again to be received into communion, assured the Church of their repentance. For those penitents were enjoined certain fasts and other things, by which they might prove that they were truly, and from the heart, weary of their former life, or rather might obliterate the remembrance of their past deeds: in this way they were said to give satisfaction, not to God, but to the Church. The same thing is expressed by Augustine in a passage in his *Enchiridion ad Laurentium*, cap. 65. From that ancient custom the satisfactions and confessions now in use took their rise. It is indeed a viperish progeny, not even a vestige of the better form now remaining. I know that ancient writers sometimes speak harshly; nor do I deny, as I lately said, that they have perhaps erred; but dogmas, which were tainted with a few blemishes, now that they have fallen into the unwashed hands of those men, are altogether defiled. And if we were to decide the contest by authority of the Fathers, what kind of Fathers are those whom they obtrude upon us? A great part of those, from whom Lombard their *Coryphæus* framed his *centos*, are extracted from the absurd dreams of certain monks passing under the names of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Chrysostom. On the present subject almost all his extracts are from the book of Augustine *De Pœnitentia*, a book absurdly compiled by some rhapsodist, alike from good and bad authors—a book which indeed bears the name of Augustine, but which no person of the least learning would deign to acknowledge as his. Wishing to save my readers trouble, they will pardon me for not searching minutely into all their absurdities. For myself it were not very laborious, and might gain some applause, to give a complete exposure of dogmas which have hitherto been vaunted as mysteries; but as my object is to give useful instruction, I desist.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (1845). [\*Institutes of the Christian religion\*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 182–234). Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society.

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...*

***THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER  
OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN  
CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH!  
(James 5: 16 NAS)***

# Saints No Longer Just Christians

Chapter 6

AD 673 - AD 1295

ROSE PUBLISHING

- The earliest writings of Christendom refer to *all* believers as saints.
- In the 200's, the term was reserved strictly for those made martyr.
- In the 300's, the phrase was used in specific reference to bishops.
- In the early church, the term was of a local designation.
- In the later church, the pope canonized.
- During the middle ages, people prayed more to the saints than they did to God.

| DESIGNATED SAINT | PATRON'S PRAYER |
|------------------|-----------------|
| ANTHONY          | Incarcerated    |
| ALPHONSUS        | Perfect Love    |
| CLAUDE           | Despair         |
| DROGO            | Really Ugly     |
| DYMPHINA         | Chastity        |
| REGIS            | Bastards        |



## What is a Saint?

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div.](#)



One of our readers posed an excellent question. He asked: “Paul talks a lot about saints. He writes about, ‘to the saints at Ephesus, etc.’ Who are these saints? Do they know they are saints? Did Paul know he was a saint? I understand it that sainthood is a reward for later.” The concept of a saint and sainthood is often misunderstood. Due to the teachings of certain religious groups, sainthood is supposedly only achieved by “super” Christians who lived an almost perfect life and did some type of verifiable miracle. After the person’s death, his or her life and actions are put through an extensive process of nominating, voting, and ultimately confirmation as a saint. When we look into the Bible, however, we see a completely different, and much simpler explanation of what a saint actually is.

The short answer to the sainthood question is that God refers to any person who becomes a Christian as a saint. The word “saint” is a form of the term “sanctify” and simply means one who is set apart in holy service to God. First Corinthians 1:2 gives us a clear example of this use of the term: “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” Notice that the letter is written to all the members of the church in Corinth. They are all said to be sanctified, or set apart. Furthermore, Paul insists that all the Christians were “called to be saints” with “**all** those....” The Bible declares that all Christians, everywhere, are saints.

To better understand this idea, consider the concept of being “sanctified.” What group of people is sanctified, or set apart for holy service to God? In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Paul reminded the Corinthian church about sins they had committed in the past. He then stated, “But you were washed, but you **sanctified**, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (vs. 11) Notice that all the Christians in Corinth were sanctified and set apart to God’s service, not just a chosen, elite group.

The beginning of Paul’s epistle to the Romans clarifies sainthood even further. Paul explains that He is a servant of Christ “separated,” or better translated “set apart,” to the Gospel of God (1:1). He then writes, “To **all** who are in Rome, beloved of God, **called to be saints.**” Again, take note of Paul’s use of the word “**all**” to refer to all the Christians in Rome who were “called” to be saints. How, then, is a person called to be a saint? Paul hints at that with his statement about being set apart “to the gospel of God.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14, He more directly states that “God from the beginning chose you [the church of the Thessalonians—KB] for salvation through **sanctification** by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our **gospel**, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God, through the inspired Paul, explains that any person who has become a Christian through belief and obedience to the Gospel (see 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8), has been sanctified and is considered a saint.

Depending on the translation you use, the terms saint or saints are used approximately 60 times in the New Testament. Even a brief look at those verses will show that the Bible contains no concept of a “Super Christian” being a saint. Paul concluded his letter to the Philippian church with these words: “Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you. All the saints greet you” (4:21). He wanted the Philippians to understand that all Christians are saints. These saints were alive and well. Their lives had not been granted sainthood after their deaths. Nor did they have to verify that they had performed a documented miracle to achieve a higher level of holiness. What had they done to become saints? They simply obeyed the Gospel of Christ when it was preached to them, just as the 3,000 did on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

It is sometimes tempting to compare our lives to others and view ourselves as “less holy.” We might even have stated in the past, when asked about our behavior, “Well, I’m no saint.” The fact is, however, that no one ever gained a level of holiness that could earn a place in heaven. Christians are holy, able to be called saints, not because they earned salvation or because they are super spiritual. On the contrary, God made “Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [Christ—KB]” (2 Corinthians 5:21). All faithful Christians are holy saints, not because they are spiritual giants, but because of “the precious blood of Christ” which He shed “as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19).

## **Descriptive Terms of Christians: Saints**

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One term which is rather generally neglected with reference to Christians is the word "saint." Probably, this is largely due to the Catholic doctrine about sainthood. The Catholic Church began the process of canonization of "saints" in the ninth century.

"In the Roman Church this (canonization, mw) is done by the pope only, who, after the examination, declares the person in question to have led a perfect life, and that God hath worked miracles at his intercession, either during his life or after his death, and That, consequently, he Is worthy to be honored as a saint, which implies permission to exhibit his relics, to invoke him, and to celebrate mass and an office in his honor.' . . . The worship of `canonized saints' is enjoined by the Council of Trent" (McClintock and Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. II, pp. 90-91).

No one can become a saint until at least fifty years after his death, according to Roman thought.

That Catholic usage is not the same as the New Testament usage of the word "saint" is obvious from Rom. 1:7. In that passage, Paul addressed the church at Rome as follows: "to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called saints." Obviously, he was not writing to the local graveyard! Hagios, the Greek word from which "saint" is translated, is defined as follows: "In the plural, as used of believers, it designates all such and is not applied merely to persons of exceptional holiness, or to those who, having died, were characterized by exceptional acts of saintliness" (W. E. Vine, An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. III, p. 315). Thus, "saint" is another term to be considered in any series which considers the descriptive names of Christians. But, what is the significance of being called a saint?

## **To Be Set Apart**

The primary thrust of the word saint is the idea of being set apart to God, as it were, exclusively His. Hagios is the same word which is translated "holy" in other passages. The main idea is drawn from the Jewish usage of the Hebrew word *godesh*. Some places were set apart as sacred by God's presence (cf. Ex. 3:5, the place of the appearance of God to Moses). The Temple was a holy place set apart to the worship of God; it was not to be used for profane purposes (cf. Jesus' cleansing of the Temple, Jn. 2:13-22). All of the furniture inside the Temple was set apart in a similar fashion. The priests who served in the Temple were "holy unto the Lord" (Lev. 21:6) because they were set apart to His worship. In a similar sense, the whole nation of Israel was holy, not in the sense of moral purity, but in the sense of being separated especially to God (Jer. 2:3; Ex. 19:5,6; Dent. 7:6).

When the word *hagios* is applied to Christians, the first implication from the word is that Christians are "set apart to the service of God." They are not common people; they "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). Everyone who has been obedient to Jesus Christ is a saint, a person set apart to God. As Paul described the change in the life of the Corinthians, he intimated that they were sanctified and justified when they were "washed" (baptized). He said, "And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Thus, every individual who submits to baptism in obedience to the Lord enters a special relationship with God. He has been "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2). "But the thought lies very near, that what is set apart from the world and to God, should separate itself from the world's defilements, and should share in God's purity; and in this way *hagios* speedily acquires a moral significance" (R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, pp. 331-332).

## **Ethical Connotation**

The verb *hagiazō* and the noun *hagiasmos* are related to each other. The English conveys the same relationship with "to sanctify" and "sanctification." Sanctification refers to the process by which one eradicates evil from his life and incorporates righteousness into it. Thus, a saint is not only one who is set apart to Christ, but also is one who is living a morally pure life (not a sinlessly perfect life). Thus, the Hebrew writer said, "Pursue after peace with all men, and after the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (6:12). All of the passages which speak about the Christian's separation from the world are relevant to this point. We cite only a few of them: 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Tit. 2:11-14; 2 Tim. 2:22; Rom. 6:17-18. Thus, the second idea to be conveyed when Christians are called "saints" is that they are in the process of moving toward moral purity. This does not mean that they have already arrived at sinless perfection but that they are aiming for it. At this point, a couple of other passages become relevant.

## **The Process of Sanctification**

Jesus said, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (Jn. 17:17). In just what way is sanctification related to the word? Actually, the word of God is related to the process of being set apart and the process of moral purification. But, let us consider how this is done. A person is led to Christ through the teaching of the word of God (Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 1:22-23; Jn. 6:44-45). One learns of God's will, believes it, and obeys it, causing him to become set apart to God.

The process of moral purification works in the same fashion. Consider what Paul said concerning the Scriptures in 2 Tim. 3:16,17. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." Notice some of the usages of Scripture: (1) Reproof. The idea is that the person is convicted of the sinfulness of his conduct. (2) Correction. Correction is the restoration to an upright state. Thus, the Scriptures do not leave a person convicted of sin, they straighten him up. (3) Instruction in Righteousness. Having demonstrated that the wrong manner of life must be corrected, the Scriptures also point the way to the right kind of living. The Scriptures do not stop with the "Thou shalt not's;" they add the "Thou shalt's."

Thus, the sanctification process is related to the Scriptures in this way. Through them we learn of our misconduct, the way to correct our lives, and the right way of life. Thus, the sanctification of the believer "is not vicarious, i.e., it cannot be transferred or imputed, it is an individual possession, built up, little by little, as the result of obedience to the Word of God, and of following the example of Christ" (W. E. Vine, op. cit.). Paul said, "But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life" (Rom. 6:11).

## **Conclusion**

Thus, the word saint is one of the most significant words applied to the Christian. It testifies to both the unique relationship sustained between him and God and his moral character. Needless to say, many who call themselves Christians are not reflecting the moral character of a saint. Such a person is self-deceived if he believes that he can walk in the ways of the world and sustain a right relationship to God. Since a Christian is sanctified and in the process of sanctification, he can be called a saint. Are you-a Christian?

Truth Magazine, XX:14, p. 9-1  
April 1, 1976

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...*

***THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER  
OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN  
CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH!  
(James 5: 16 NAS)***

### **FOLLOWING BELL-WETHERED PATHWAYS OF THE HUMAN MIND -**

One day, through the primeval wood, A calf walked home, as good calves should; But made a trail all bent askew, A crooked trail as all calves do. Since three hundred years have fled, And I infer, the calf is dead. But still he left behind his trail, And thereby hangs my moral tale. The trail was taken up next day, By a lone dog that passes that way; And then a wise bell-wether sheep, Pursued the trail o'er vale and steep, And drew the flock behind him, too. As good bell-wethers always do. And from that day, o'er hill and glade, Through those old woods a path was made. And many men wound in and out, And dodged, and turned, and bent about And uttered words of righteous wrath, Because 'twas such a crooked path.

But still they followed - do not laugh - The first migrations of that calf, And through this winding woodway stalked, Because he wobbled when he walked. This forest path became a lane, That bent, and turned, and turned again; This crooked lane became a road, Where many a poor horse with his load, Toiled on beneath the burning sun, And traveled some three miles in one. And thus a century and a half, They trod the footsteps of that calf. The years passed on in swiftness fleet, The road became a village street; And this, before men were aware, A city's crowded thoroughfare; And soon the central street was this, Of a renowned metropolis; And men two centuries and a half, Trod in the footsteps of that calf. Each day a hundred thousand rout Followed the zigzag calf about; And o'er his crooked journey went, The traffic of a continent.

A hundred thousand men were led By one calf near three centuries dead. They followed still his crooked way, And lost one hundred years a day; For thus such reverence is lent, To well-established precedent, A moral lesson this might teach, Were I ordained and called to preach; For men are prone to go it blind, Along the calf-paths of the mind, And work away from sun to sun, To do what other men have done. They follow in the beaten track, And out and in, and forth and back, And still their devious course pursue, To keep the path that others do. They keep the path a sacred groove, Along which all their lives they move. But how the wise old wood-gods laugh, Who saw the first primeval calf! Ah! Many things this tale might teach – But I am not ordained to preach. - SAM WALTER FOSS



## **THEOLOGICAL TRENDLINES OF TRADITIONAL THINKING**

### **EARLY ERROR BUILT ON THREE FALSE ASSUMPTIONS**

- #1 **Assumption: Paul Convert Clement Received As An Apostle**
- #2 **Assumption: Origen Explains Trinity Concept Sequential**
- #3 **Assumption: Irenaeus Portrays Jesus Mother @Anti-Eve**

In other words, first, by Clement of Rome continuing to write instructional and disciplinary letters – claiming continuity of the apostolic office in congregational letter writing of epistolary form - along with their uncritical acceptance by brethren of the post-apostolic period – shortly followed by the Cyprianic Principle of Apostolic Succession - we have a quantum destabilization of the *Organizational Pattern*.

In other words, second, by the Alexandrian Theological School & its thought leader Origen (184 – 253 A.D.) explanation of the Trinity in Cause & Effect as an Ignited Torch Sequentially Passed Sparking Life - from God Eternal to His Son Jesus Christ and/or the Holy Ghost – we have initiated - the Battle Over A Greek “i”.

### **The Theanthropic “i” Debate of *Homoousios* or *Homoiousios*?**

Question: Was the Son of Man of same or similar divinity as God the Father? This was the pivotal argument dividing churches East & West in the Filioque Crisis & that religiously severed corresponding to state sovereignty. [Both Wrong]

“In 867, Constantinople’s Patriarch Photius excommunicated the pope on the basis of insertion of the Filioque Clause in the creed, which asserted that the Holy Spirit proceed from both the Father and the Son. This argument, that the pope was himself a heretic - would be used with increased regularity in the East.” – Modern Scholar “One Holy, Catholic & Apostolic”

Again, scriptural commentary by an uninspired individual had the unintentional consequence of quantum destabilization of the *Doctrinal Pattern and Becoming Dogma*.

Lastly, the award for the worse casual commentary ever of theological speculation in terms of its unforeseen application & unintended consequence – belongs to *Church Father Irenaeus the Bishop of Lyon (130 – 202 A.D.)* This accomplished defender of the faith fighting against the Gnostic Heresy - jump starts another – one of great effect cumulative through the centuries.

Irenaeus writes in *Against Heresies* “So the Lord now manifestly came to his own, and, born by his own created order which he himself bears, he by his obedience on the tree renewed [and reversed] what was done by disobedience in [connection with] a tree; and [the power of] that seduction by which the virgin Eve, already betrothed to a man, had been wickedly seduced was broken when the angel in truth brought good tidings to the Virgin Mary, who already [by her betrothal] belonged to a man. As the human race was subjected to death through [the act of] a virgin, so was it saved by a virgin, and thus the disobedience of one virgin was precisely balanced by another’s obedience.”

The Nestorian and other Christological controversies of the fourth century resulted in the acceptance of Mary as the 'Mother of God' and entitled her to special honors in the liturgy. In terms of her future veneration, these doctrinal tracks had developed quite rapidly by about the year 590 A.D. The veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, which was to lead to the adoption of the doctrines of her immaculate conception in 1854 and her miraculous assumption to heaven in 1950, developed rapidly by 590.

### **Mariology – Mother Mary – Born Innocent of Original Sin.**

#### Posterity's Uncritical Acceptance of Augustine's Platonism

“Their understanding of conception, shaped by a patriarchal culture, would have been some variation of the dominant Aristotelian theory. On this view, the male semen provides the formative principle for life. The female menstrual blood supplies the matter for the fetus, and the womb the medium for the semen's nurture. The man's seed transmits his logos (rational cause) and pneuma (vital heat/animating spirit), for which the woman's body is the receptacle. In this way the male functions as the active, efficient cause of reproduction, and the female functions as the provider of the matter to which the male seed gives definition. In short, the bodily substance necessary for a human fetus comes from the mother, while the life force originates with the father.

Platonists believed that all physical objects are simply copies of eternal, immaterial templates or Forms. This means that two objects of the same kind have a sort of connection because they both depend on the same Form. So, the terrible taint of Adam can spread to those who share his Form, the Form of humanity. This inheritance concept of fatalistic disposition and consequence can similarly be linked to classic theories of genetics. It was believed that everything children inherit is received from the father alone. The mother contributed nothing material to fetal development and served simply as an incubator. It was considered a matter of simple common sense that embryo existed entire in seed form within the male before implantation. The father once existed in seed form in his father too, and so on - and so on - all the way back to the Garden of Eden - similar to a set of Russian Dolls.” – Jonathan Hill Book

“Further testimony is borne to the heinousness of this doctrine in the fact that Protestants and Catholics make Jesus exempt from original sin. Of course, it would heap outrage upon outrage for them not to do so, but their having to do it only makes their error all the more conspicuous. Catholics have also seen fit to make Mary an exception to the rule by virtue of the doctrine of immaculate conception. If it is right for God to transfer Adam’s sin nature to his descendants, why would it be wrong for Him to do so in the case of Jesus?

The practical need to make Jesus an exception is quite understandable, but the query is directed at the moral right to make Jesus an exception to that which blights all men. If it would have been wrong to transfer Adam's sin nature to Jesus, why is it right for Him to do so in the cases of other men? How is it right to do to men what it would be wrong to do to Jesus? It appears that there is a double standard. The Catholics simply issue what amounts to an ipse dixit about it in the case of Mary. If God could arrange for Jesus to be born without original sin, why couldn't He have arranged the very same thing for all men? Is God "a respecter of persons" (Acts 10: 34)? Moreover, if Jesus had to be made like His brethren in all things (Hebrews 2) & was tempted in all things they are (chap. 4), how is it that He was preserved from the very thing that compels them to sin? If God gave to men that from which He preserved Jesus, then Jesus is different from His brethren in a most radical, fundamental, and irreconcilable way! The Hebrews writer's claim becomes nothing.

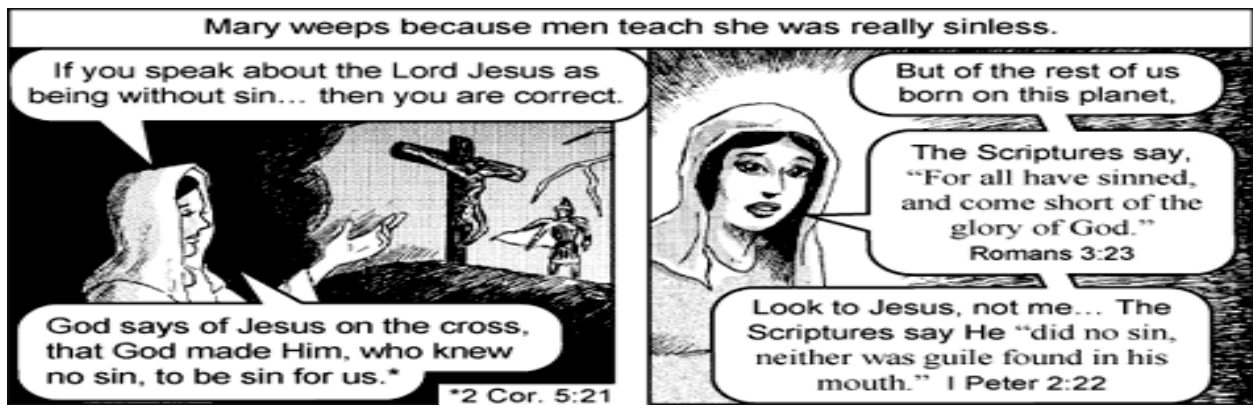
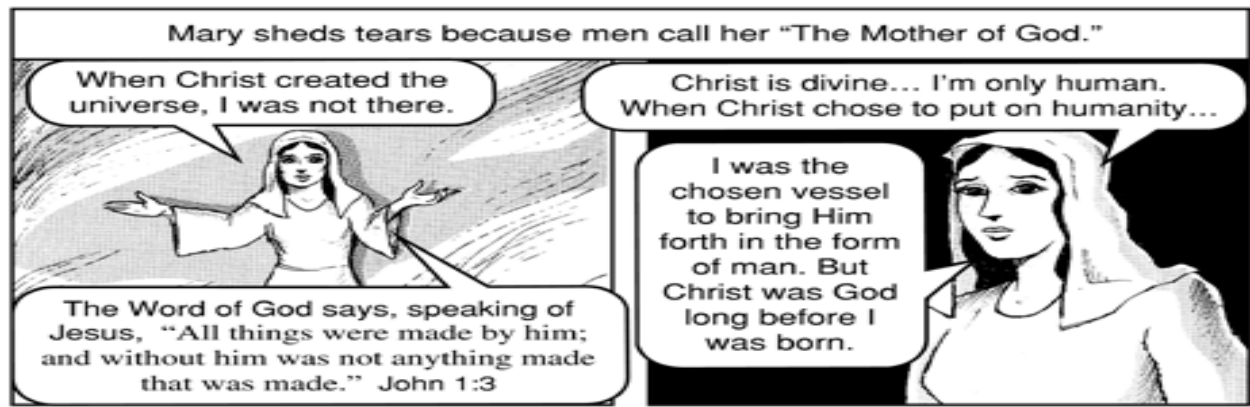
Proponents of original sin sense this difficulty and try to resolve it by saying that Jesus' virgin birth was necessitated by the need to preserve Him from original sin. For several reasons this solution falls short of its aim: (1) It would not resolve the moral dilemma for Calvinists, even if it were true! (2) Nowhere in the Scriptures is a doctrine of original sin assigned as a basis for Jesus' virgin birth! (3) Sinfulness, or a sinful nature, is not genetically transferable anyway! (4) Even though Jesus was virgin-born, He was still a physical descendant of Adam because

His mother was! Finally, when all is said and done, it may be observed that the real problem of original sin lies not in how it is transmitted but by the very fact that it is transmitted at all! No conceivable answer can absolve God from the responsibility He would have to bear for the sins of men if He creates them with sinful natures that compel them to sin. Calvinism is rotten at its taproot! Original sin, since it defies and defiles the very nature of God, is as fundamentally wrong as any false doctrine could be!” (Internet Information)

**The Hell Harrowing.** “According to tradition, Jesus closed hell for a thousand years. However, this caused problems for theologians and for believers. If hell is closed what happens to the souls of the wicked? - “The early Christians were obligated to introduce the concept of a sort of waiting room, where souls would stay for the thousand years until hell was open again. They found a ready-made idea – limbo – that they freely borrowed from the Romans, who had borrowed it from the Greeks. This was all fine until the year 1000AD, when Satan’s banishment was supposed to end... But nothing happened. The theologians set to work and said that Satan was now out and about in the world – tempting and tormenting – and that hell was still closed but that there was another place where sinners would be punished. *This was purgatory. It was a cross between limbo and hell. But if Satan was absent, who was to run it? Jesus’ mother, **the Virgin Mary**, was called back from heaven, where she had been asleep (**the Dormition**). She was given the keys of to look after, and the running of purgatory.*

She does not administer any punishments – in fact, her main job seems to be protecting the souls of the sinners from the wrath of her son.” Richard Craze, Hell: Illustrated, pgs. 44,45

Again, scriptural commentary by an uninspired individual had the unintentional consequence of quantum destabilization of the *Worshiping Pattern*.



## Will This Pope Name Mary the Co-Redeemer?

“Pressure is mounting on the new Pope Benedict XVI to ‘infallibly’ declare the Roman Catholic Virgin Mary as ‘co-redemptrix,’ with Jesus the Redeemer, Mediatrix of all graces with Jesus the one Mediator, and Advocate with Jesus Christ on behalf of the human race.”

When done, this will be the fifth ‘dogma’ defining the position of the Virgin Mary goddess in Roman Catholicism. The others include ‘Mother of God,’ ‘Perpetual Virginity,’ ‘Immaculate Conception,’ and ‘Assumption’ into heaven.

In the fifth century, the popes reasoned that since Jesus was God, Mary must be the ‘Mother of God’ and deserved worship as such.

‘Perpetual Virginity’ is defined as continuing to be a physical virgin even after the birth of Jesus and thus having no children by her husband, Joseph. This also elevates her toward a position akin to divinity.

‘Immaculate Conception’ defines her as without sin from birth, just as Jesus was. The reasoning is that, otherwise, Jesus would have been tainted by Original Sin. ‘Assumption’ declares that she was taken directly into heaven, body and soul, just as Jesus was.

Now the push is on to further elevate this false redeemer into a position, for all practical purposes, co-equal with the divine Savior. She will be in charge of dispensing God’s grace, and standing in for Jesus as mediator and advocate for mankind. Having reduced Jesus to a wafer god stored in a box, the popes have, instead, directed the worship of the precious Roman Catholics to this Virgin Mary goddess.

Thus we see the steps taken to elevate the lowly Mary of the Bible to a goddess-like position. For centuries, the Roman Catholic layman has been encouraged to pray to this Virgin Mary goddess instead of directly to God or the Lord Jesus.

With this fifth ‘dogma,’ she will have effectively elbowed Jesus aside and assumed the central focus of attention for the one-billion-plus Roman Catholics trapped in the superstition and ignorance of this pagan false church.” – Battle Cry



*Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed...*

***THE EFFECTIVE PRAYER  
OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN  
CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH!  
(James 5: 16 NAS)***

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## GRACE ABUSE: COATTAIL RIGHTEOUSNESS

by Jesus People on Errors of Calvin

Five points of Calvinism(T.U.L.I.P.)

### Grace of God Is Redefined

- ⦿ Calvinism's distinctive doctrines could be better called 'the doctrines of damnation,' because they promise damnation to the majority of people. God offers no grace and no hope of salvation for them, as they are doomed from before they were even born to an eternal hell!

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*CALVIN TAUGHT & T.U.L.I.P. TEACHES A TWISTED GOSPEL OF GRACE!*

# Grace of God Is Redefined

One of the most common arguments that Calvinists use revolves around a unique definition of grace. “If people are saved ‘by grace alone,’” they say, “then people can’t play any part in their salvation. Salvation must be 100% the work of God if it is truly salvation by grace.”

Calvinists have even labeled their distinctive doctrines as ‘the doctrines of grace,’ as if none else have a theology of grace!

Calvinism’s distinctive doctrines could be better called ‘the doctrines of damnation,’ because they promise damnation to the majority of people. God offers no grace and no hope of salvation for them, as they are doomed from before they were even born to an eternal hell!

Calvinists believe that God could have saved everyone just as easily as He saved those whom He allegedly predestined for salvation, but He was pleased to save only a small minority of those He created in His image. The rest He was pleased to foreordain to hell. We cannot help but ask, ‘If God is love, what kind of love is that?’ John Wesley, founder of the Methodists, replied, ‘That’s the kind of *love* that makes one’s blood run cold!

**Does salvation by grace require that human beings play no part in their salvation? NO!** Imagine if I were bankrupt, but someone paid my debts and gave me a fresh start by means of a million dollar check & some great business advice. Would you say that my financial recovery was not ‘by grace alone’ because I had to deposit the check into my bank account in order to enjoy the benefits of my benefactor? **Of course not!!**

**Does salvation by grace require that human beings play no part in their salvation?** So if such logic would be considered absurd by anyone & everyone, why is the same logic, when applied to salvation, swallowed by Calvinists?

Why do Calvinists accuse non-Calvinists of not having a gospel of grace simply because we maintain that those who are saved are those who, as the Bible teaches, don't resist God's gracious drawing? If you accept a birthday gift, is that a 'work' that lessens the grace of the giver?

Calvinist logic that sets grace against human response is not a logic that can be supported by any scripture. There are no verses in the Bible that tell us that if salvation is of grace, then human free will plays no part in the salvation process. Rather, the Bible affirms that salvation is all of grace & also affirms that those who are saved are those who, by their own wills, do not resist God's gracious drawing.

**Calvinists elevate human reasoning above Scripture's revelation, making God's grace and human responsibility mutually exclusive concepts, while the Bible makes them mutually inclusive. Applying the same kind of human logic, we could claim that, because salvation is by grace alone and human responsibility plays no part, Christians can sin all they may want without eternal consequences. Yet, the same Bible that affirms salvation is by grace alone also affirms that the unrighteous 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' (First Corinthians 6: 9, 10). Does your will have anything to do with your not stealing? If your answer is *yes*, then you have just admitted that your will plays a part in whether or not you will inherit eternal life.**

**Salvation is by grace from beginning to end - God graciously draws everyone in the world by means of His creation & their God-given consciences. He awes them & convicts them. He expects every person whom He so draws to seek Him {Acts 7:26}. Those who seek Him do so only because of His gracious initiative. And Jesus promised that those who seek will find {Matthew 7:7}. Scripture affirms that God 'is a rewarder of those who seek Him {Hebrews 11: 6}.**

**If people are incapable of seeking God, as some claim, then we would have to wonder why the Bible scripture says otherwise. – *Jesus People***



***OF COURSE I'M GOING TO HEAVEN!! GRANDPAPA FOUNDED THIS CHURCH!***

by Bob Taylor of the Firm Foundation

## Five points of John Calvin Along With All Catholicism

### 3. Rationale Fallacious Grounded

- ⊙ **There is no coattail righteousness in the Bible -**  
The righteousness of other people is not imputed to us. I am not a child of God simply because someone else is; I am not sober, righteous, and godly because someone else is. I am not on my way to heaven simply because somebody else is. There is no coattail righteousness taught in the Bible. In the realm of politics a man might sweep into lesser office by catching hold of the coattail of a much more popular politician. But no one is going to heaven by hanging onto the righteousness of another.

by Bob Taylor of the Firm Foundation

## Five points of John Calvin Along With All Catholicism

### 3. Rationale Fallacious Grounded

- ⊙ **There is no coattail righteousness in the Bible -**  
Transferred or borrowed righteousness is not taught in Holy Writ. The foolish virgins in Matthew 25 thought they could borrow righteousness, preparation and readiness from the wise five in that famed, familiar parable. They requested of the wise five what couldn't be transferred or transmitted – righteousness and readiness to meet the Lord in peace!
- ⊙ It is also an egregious error, yet one widely held, that Deity transfers to us the personal righteousness of God the Father or the personal righteousness of Jesus Christ.

by Bob Taylor of the Firm Foundation

## Five points of John Calvin Along With All Catholicism

### 3. Rationale Fallacious Grounded

- ⊙ There are only two ways a person might be justified or counted righteous. I know of no 3<sup>rd</sup> alternative. (1) If a person never sinned & always maintained absolutely perfect obedience, he would be counted as righteous or justified simply upon the basis that he had never violated a single statute of the Lord's will. Were this ever the case, then man might well glory and boast that he had earned or merited his heavenly salvation. His justification then would be a matter of debt—not of grace or favor. (2) The second way is for God to declare man justified by grace (God's part) through an obedient faith (man's part).

by Bob Taylor of the Firm Foundation

## Five points of John Calvin Along With All Catholicism

### 3. Rationale Fallacious Grounded

- ⊙ Righteousness is not something transferred to us. We do not inherit it – nor - we do not borrow it from those we think have a superabundance of it.
- ⊙ Peter told the first Gentiles to be converted under God's glorious Gospel that acceptance to God comes from fearing (respecting) God and working righteousness. God's plan of righteousness is revealed in the Gospel from "faith to faith" (Romans 1:16, 17). Those at Corinth had become righteous when they came into Christ Jesus (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 1:30). They had become a washed, a sanctified, and a justified people (1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 6:11). This is how they became righteous. They remained in a righteous, justified or saved state as long as they did the Father's will.

# GRACE ABUSE: SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE

## The Doctrines of Calvinism

### T-U-L-I-P

- .Total Hereditary Depravity
- .Unconditional Election
- .Limited Atonement
- .Irresistible Grace

## Irresistible Grace

**An unregenerate person cannot voluntarily believe in God but once God determines to save him, that same individual cannot overcome or resist the power of God no matter what he may desire.**



# John Calvin and Grace

By Wayne Jackson



One of the most influential religious figures of the last millennium was John Calvin of Switzerland. Calvin was born in 1509. At the age of fourteen, he went to Paris to study the classics. He was so austere that his fellow students nicknamed him “The Accusative Case.”

In 1529, he commenced the study of civil law. Presently, though, Calvin became intrigued with the teachings of the German reformers and so gave himself to the study of religion.

In 1533, he broke with the Roman Catholic Church after a religious “experience” during which he believed he received a commission from God to restore the Church to its original purity.

By the year 1536, at the age of only twenty-six, he had completed the first edition of his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The initial edition was a small volume of six chapters. The final version (1560)—revised over the years—had grown to eighty chapters.

To a significant degree, Calvin’s views—which were developed from the writings of Augustine, a “bishop” in northern Africa (A.D. 353-430)—have formed the doctrinal basis of much of modern Protestantism.

In this article, we wish to briefly comment upon John Calvin's influence upon the religious community on the subject of grace. His ideas are circulated in several denominations, and, tragically, have found their way into the thinking of many people.

One of Calvin's prominent errors was the notion that man is born totally depraved, having inherited both the effects and the guilt of Adam's original sin.

Even infants, therefore, have in them the seed of sin. Indeed, their whole nature is a sort of a sin-seed, so that they cannot be anything other than corrupt before God (*Institutes* ii.I.8).

At birth, then, all men stand in need of the Lord's grace. From this fundamental error, others spring.

## Limited Grace

One of the cornerstones of Calvin's theology was the dogma of predestination. This is the notion that, consistent with his own sovereignty, God, before the foundation of the world, pre-determined who would be saved and who would be lost.

In view of this, when Christ died, his death was efficacious **only for the elect**.

This concept of limited atonement—hence, limited grace—is so foreign to the teaching of the Scriptures that it is difficult to see how anyone with an elementary knowledge of the New Testament could accept it.

Hear the testimony of Paul:

“For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to **all men**” (Tit. 2:11).

Because God loved the entire world (Jn. 3:16), and so wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and not a single one to perish (2 Pet. 3:9), Christ died to be the propitiation for sins—not just for the elect, but potentially for the entire world as well (1 Jn. 2:2).

## Irresistible Grace

Calvinism argues that by a secret and special operation of the Holy Spirit, God's grace is poured forth upon the elect. Since the extension of this grace is an act of divine power, it cannot be resisted any more than the original creation could have resisted the creative might of the Lord (Hodge 1960, 688).

But the fact is, though God's grace is generously offered, **it must be received** by the sinner.

“[W]e entreat also that you receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Cor. 6:1).

It is certainly possible to “receive not” that which is offered (cf. Jn. 1:11).

## Unconditional Grace

Calvinists argue that grace is given to the elect **unconditionally**. If such is the case, then there is absolutely nothing that one must do in order to receive salvation—not even believe.

One writer states:

[W]e believe that there is no warrant whatsoever for the view that John 3:16 lays down faith as a condition to be performed by the lost person in order to attain spiritual eternal life.

Again he says:

God, without the use of the gospel or any other human means, will save all of his redeemed loved ones in every land and in every age (Sarrels 1978, 443-444).

The foregoing affirmations are ludicrous.

Paul declares that we have “access by faith into this grace” (Rom. 5:2). In his discussion of grace in his epistle to Titus, the inspired apostle states that God,

“according to his mercy, saved us through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit ... being justified by his grace” (Tit. 3:5-7).

Paul equates being saved by the **washing of regeneration** with being justified by grace. The washing is an allusion to **man's response** to God by submitting to baptism.

Grace is supplied by the Lord—independent of any merit on our part. Clearly, though, the washing of regeneration is a condition of our redemption.

But is that expression an allusion to baptism? Even Calvin admitted that he had “no doubt” that Paul was alluding to baptism—though he denied the connection between baptism and salvation (see Shepherd 1950, 405).

## Irrevocable Grace

Calvin maintained that the elect could be certain that God would never allow them to fall away from the faith. They would thus persevere unto the end.

A sizable segment of Protestantism has adopted the doctrine to some degree or another. Charles Stanley, a prominent Baptist clergyman, has attempted to argue this case in a recent book (see Jackson 1993).

But the New Testament teaches otherwise. A child of God can **fall from grace** (Gal. 5:4), or fail, i.e., fall back from the Lord's favor (Heb. 12:15; cf. ASV fn).

It is possible to deny the Master who **bought** you and so be **destroyed** (2 Pet. 2:1). Thus, we must keep ourselves in God's love (Jude 21) and give diligence to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10), lest our reception of divine grace be **in vain** (2 Cor. 6:1).

## Conclusion

While we acknowledge that John Calvin taught some truth, we must also recognize that he advocated much error, and that error must be rejected.

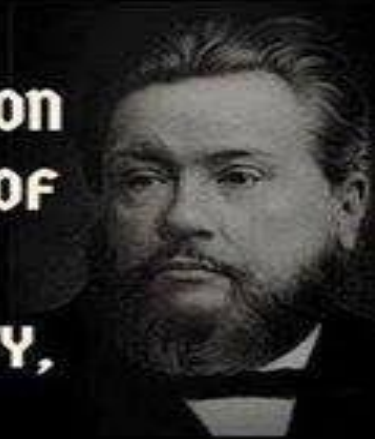
# THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE



**T**OTAL  
DEPRAVITY  
**U**NCONDITIONAL  
ELECTION  
**L**IMITED  
ATONEMENT  
**I**RRESISTIBLE  
GRACE  
**P**ERSEVERANCE  
OF THE SAINTS

WE BELIEVE, THAT THE WORK  
OF REGENERATION,  
CONVERSION, SANCTIFICATION  
AND FAITH, IS NOT AN ACT OF  
MAN'S FREE WILL AND  
POWER, BUT OF THE MIGHTY,  
EFFICACIOUS AND  
IRRESISTIBLE GRACE OF GOD.

CH SPURGEON





‘ALMIGHTY GRACE RIDES  
VICTORIOUSLY OVER THE  
NECK OF FREE-WILL, AND  
LEADS IT CAPTIVE IN  
GLORIOUS CAPTIVITY TO  
THE ALL-CONQUERING  
POWER OF IRRESISTIBLE  
GRACE AND LOVE.’

-CHARLES H. SPURGEON

## Irresistible Grace Defined by Calvinists

“Since it is the will of God that those whom He gave His dear Son in eternity past should be saved, He will surely act in sovereign grace in such a way that the elect will find Christ irresistible. God does not force the elect to trust His Son but rather, gives them life. The *dead* human Spirit finds the dead spirit of Satan irresistible, and all *living* human spirits find the God of the living irresistible.

Regeneration (the work of God) must precede true repentance and faith.” - Duane Edward Spencer, *TULIP: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture*

## Calvinism: Irresistible Grace

Larry Ray Hafley  
Pekin, Illinois

### I. Introduction:

#### A. Definition of the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

1. "All those whom God has predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh; renewing their wills, by His almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

"This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it" (The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 10).

2. "As Calvinists we hold that the condition of men since the fall is such that if left to themselves they would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation. Christ would then have died in vain. But since it was promised that He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied, the effects of that sacrifice have not been left suspended upon the whim of man's changeable and sinful will. Rather, the work of God in redemption has been rendered effective through the mission of the Holy Spirit who so operates on the chosen people that they are brought to repentance and faith, and thus made heirs of eternal life" (Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, p. 163).

3. Irresistible - "that cannot be successfully resisted or opposed" (Webster).

B. This doctrine logically follows other Calvinistic tenets and teachings.

I. If one is totally depraved as Calvinism alleges that he is, i.e., "opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil," then it follows that God must alter this state, for one in that condition could do nothing toward righteousness.

2. Our study, therefore, must focus on the state or condition of the sinner. Further, we must see the operation of the Spirit in the conviction and conversion of the sinner.

## II. Discussion:

A. True, the sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13). But what does this mean?

1. Calvinism equates deadness of sinner with a dead body. As one would not command a corpse to act in order to have life, so one cannot tell a "dead" sinner to act.

2. But the sinner's death is not one of inability to act.

a. Sinner "walked" and "lived" in lusts (Eph. 2:2, 3; Col. 3:7 - NASB).

b. While acting, he was said to be dead, but how, in what sense?

(1) Obviously, not like a dead body, a corpse.

(2) "Dead in sins" equals separation from God's favor, unforgiven (Isa. 59:1, 2; Col. 1:21; 1 Tim. 5:6).

(3) To be "quickened" (made alive) is to be forgiven all trespasses (Col. 2:13), hence, to be dead is to be unforgiven.

c. Calvinistic argument for irresistible grace is thus based on a false definition of death as regards the sinner.

d. Observe Calvinistic arguments that are based on this false concept.

(1) The resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of Lazarus are given as examples of how God irresistibly quickens the dead sinner (Boettner, pp. 165, 168). Neither could resist the call to life - "It was not possible" (Acts 2:24).



(2) The sinner is "dead." God must quicken them as He did Christ and as Christ did Lazarus (Jn. 5:21, 25).

(a) Yes, the voice (word) of the Son of God quickens (Psa. 119:50; Jn. 6:44, 45, 63, 68).

(b) Note: "they that hear shall live" (Jn. 5:25), but dead sinner may choose not to hear (Acts 13:26, 38, 39, 46; Matt. 13:15).

-- Calvinist Objection, One must hear voice of Son of God, not voice of preacher.

-- Answer To Objection: To hear preaching of the truth is to hear the voice of the Son of God (cf. Lk. 16:29; Acts 13:27; 15:21; Lk. 10:16). Calvinists assume immediate, direct speaking of Spirit.

3. Consider the opposite view, the "dead" saint (Rom. 6:2; Col. 3:3).

a. The saint is declared "dead" just as alien is, but in what sense? If being dead is compared to corpse as dead sinner is, saint is inactive (Eph. 2: 10)!

b. "Dead to sins" (1 Pet. 2:24) simply means separated from sins. As "dead in sins" means separated from God by sin (Col. 1:21), so "dead to sins" means alienated from guilt of sins.

c. Though saint is "dead to sins," he can choose to sin (1 Jn. 1:8-10; Rom. 6:13; 8:12, 13). So, sinner "dead in sins" can choose to obey (Rom. 6:16-18).

d. Compare case of Adam. He was certainly "dead to sin," and "totally hereditarily righteous. "

(1) It did not take a direct operation of the devil's unholy spirit to move and motivate him. The devil used words and motives. While "dead" to sins, Adam heard, believed and obeyed.

(2) Cannot God appeal to one through words and motives as the devil did, or is the devil's word more powerful than God's gospel?

B. New Testament illustration and demonstrations of resistible and acceptable grace.

1 . First, it is the word of God, the gospel, which produces faith (Jn. 17:20; 20:30; 3 1; Acts 14: 1; 15:7; Rom. 10: 17). Even the devil knows this (Lk. 8:11, 12; 1 Thess. 2:16).

2. The Holy Spirit convicts and converts the sinner, but how does He do it?

a. Through words of the Spirit (see Acts 2:4, 22, 29, 36-41).

b. By preaching the gospel "with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven" (I Pet. 1: 12), Peter:

(1) Convicted men of murder (Acts 3:13-15).

(2) Urged them to repent and turn for forgiveness (Acts 3:19, 26).

(3) And "many of them which heard the word believed" (Acts 4:4).

3. The Holy Spirit can be resisted (Acts 6:10; 7:51-55). He was resisted by refusing the word preached (Acts 13:44-46).

III. Conclusion:

A. Objections to the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

1. It makes God responsible for every lost person. All are lost because God did not act on them. See statements in creed.

2. No person has ever been found who was saved, born again, where the gospel has not gone (cf. Jonah and Rom. 10:14).

3. It denies the all-sufficiency of the gospel as God's power unto salvation.

B. What is your reaction to the word of the Spirit? Your reaction will determine your eternal destiny (Rom. 6:16-18; Acts 13:46).

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August 18, 1983

## *Series On Calvinism*

### **Irresistible Grace**

#### *by Gene Taylor*

The fourth basic doctrine of Calvinism is Irresistible Grace. It is also called Efficacious Grace or Invincible Grace. Irresistible Grace is the idea that the elect, those who Calvinists believe have been [unconditionally elected to eternal life](#), cannot resist the grace of God and heaven's determination to save them. As those elected to damnation can do nothing about it, those who are elected to salvation can do nothing to resist. The grace of God overwhelms them in such a way that even if they wanted to they could not repel it.

John Calvin believed that only a direct operation of the Holy Spirit could make one who is "dead in sin" hear the gospel and believe. This means that the gospel would not be sufficient to convict and convert the heart of the sinner. Calvinists say the Lord, through the Spirit, must appear to the sinner in a direct, miraculous way in order to bring about the sinner's conversion. And if the sinner is one whom God had predestinated to life before the foundation of the world, that sinner **must** submit to God's grace as revealed to him by the Spirit.

We will examine this fourth tenet of Calvinism, Irresistible Grace, by seeing how Calvinists themselves express this doctrine, considering the proof texts used to support it, and offering some Scriptural objections to it.

### **Irresistible Grace Expressed**

*The Westminster Confession of Faith* expresses this doctrine by saying, "All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace." (Chap. X, Sect. 1)

David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, in *The Five Points of Calvinism, Defined, Defended, Documented*, say,

"The *gospel invitation extends a call* to salvation to every one who hears its message. It invites all men without distinction to drink freely of the water of life and live. It promises salvation to all who repent and believe. But this outward general call, extended to the elect and non-elect alike, will not bring sinners to Christ. Why? Because men are by nature dead in sin and are under its power. They are of themselves unable and unwilling to forsake their evil ways and to turn to Christ for mercy. Consequently, the unregenerate will not respond to the gospel call to repentance and faith. No amount of external threatenings or promises will cause blind, deaf, dead, rebellious sinners to bow before Christ as Lord and to look to Him alone for salvation. Such an act of faith and submission is contrary to the lost man's nature.

"Therefore, the *Holy Spirit*, in order to bring God's elect to salvation, extends to them a special inward call in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ ...

"Although the general outward call of the gospel can be, and often is, rejected, the special inward call of the Spirit never fails to result in the conversion of those to whom it is made. This special call is not made to all sinners but is issued to the elect only! The Spirit is in no way dependent upon their help or cooperation for success in His work of bringing them to Christ. It is for this reason that Calvinists speak of the Spirit's call and of God's grace in saving sinners as being 'efficacious,' 'invincible,' or 'irresistible.' For the grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ!" (pp. 48-49)

## Proof Texts Used to Support Irresistible Grace

**Acts 16:14.** The argument Calvinists base on this passage is that God opened Lydia's heart to receive the word. She then heard it and was saved. The answer to this argument is that Calvinists have things out of order. The proper order is that Lydia **began** as a worshiper of God (vv. 13, 14); **after** she heard Paul, Silas and Timothy preaching, her heart was then opened (v. 14); and she responded and obeyed the Lord. (v. 15) It is interesting to note that Calvinists will use this passage as a proof text for Irresistible Grace but exclude reference to Lydia's baptism.

**Romans 8:7.** The argument here is that the "carnal mind," possessed by those who are depraved, cannot understand, believe or obey the spiritual law of God. The answer here is to consider the verse in context -- verses 1-8. Seen in the context is the free agency of man in choosing whether to obey or disobey God. In reality, the passage is teaching a simple principle: those who are spiritually minded, those who have an interest in spiritual things, will be obedient to the commands of God and those who are carnally minded, those who possess no interest in spiritual matters, will be disobedient.

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God does not force anyone to accept or reject His will. Calvinism simply views people as automatons ("A machine or control mechanism designed to follow automatically a predetermined sequence of operations or respond to encoded instructions" [*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 60] ) with no will of their own. While Calvinists teach that since a person is born totally depraved, he cannot even desire to do good, they say that if he is one of those who have been given unconditional election by God, that when God calls him, he cannot do anything to resist.

## Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

**Irresistible Grace contradicts the Scriptural principle of free agency.** This tenet of Calvinism declares that the grace of God cannot be rejected. In contrast, the Bible plainly teaches that one's salvation is conditional upon his obedience -- that one can either reject or accept **salvation** as it is offered through Jesus Christ. The grace of God has appeared to all people (**Titus 2:11**) and yet millions have rejected it. Each person is accountable for his response to the gospel. (**John 12:47-48**) Those who reject the teachings of Jesus are held responsible. (**John 5:24; 8:24**) The Bible states that each individual is free to choose whether or not to take advantage of the grace of God. It clearly demonstrates one may resist God's grace as revealed in His word.

**Irresistible Grace mistakenly portrays how people are called by God to salvation.** All people are called by the gospel. (2 Thes. 2:14) The Bible does not say that people are called by some still, small voice or by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on them. The Holy Spirit in the conviction and conversion of the sinner does not work apart from the word. (Rom. 1:16)

**Irresistible Grace changes the order of belief and salvation.** A Calvinist, Loraine Boettner, says, "A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved." (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*) But in the Bible, salvation always follows belief, i.e., faith always precedes salvation.

**John 3:16.** Belief then salvation.

**Acts 16:31.** Belief then salvation.

**Mark 16:16.** Belief, baptism, then salvation.

**Hebrews 11:6.** One cannot be saved without faith, thus making it a condition of salvation and causing it to have to precede the salvation of one's soul.

**Irresistible Grace has an erroneous view as to when one is made alive spiritually.** Steele and Thomas say, "Therefore, the *Holy Spirit*, in order to bring God's elect to salvation, extends to them a *special inward call* in addition to the outward call contained in the gospel message. Through this special call the Holy Spirit performs a work of grace within the sinner which inevitably brings him to faith in Christ. The inward change wrought in the elect sinner enables him to understand and believe spiritual truth; in the spiritual realm he is given the seeing eye and the hearing ear. The Spirit creates within him a new heart or a new nature. This is accomplished through regeneration or the new birth by which the sinner is made a child of God and is given spiritual life. His will is renewed through this process so that the sinner spontaneously comes to Christ of his own free choice. Because he is given a new nature so that he loves righteousness, and because his mind is enlightened so that he understands and believes the Biblical gospel, the renewed sinner freely and willingly turns to Christ as Lord and Saviour. Thus the once dead sinner is drawn to Christ by the inward supernatural call of the Spirit who through regeneration makes him alive and creates within him faith and repentance." (48-49) While that is what they say, the Bible teaches that one is made alive when, after hearing the gospel, he is baptized. (Col. 2:12,13; cf. John 3:3-5)

## Conclusion

The Scriptures reveal we are **saved by the grace of God**. (Eph. 2:8) However, using our freedom to choose, we accept this grace by our faith not because God forces us to accept it. (Rev. 22:17)

# Irresistible Grace

## Does order matter?...

### Matthew 7:21-27

<sup>21</sup> “Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ <sup>23</sup> And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’

<sup>24</sup> “Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; <sup>25</sup> and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. <sup>26</sup> And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; <sup>27</sup> and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”

When it comes to God's Word...

We do not read, we **feed!**

No greater respect can be shown for God's Word than making it a part of our lives and living it.

## Examples:

- **1 Peter 1:23** – You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;
- **James 1:21** - <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.  
<sup>22</sup> But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; <sup>24</sup> for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. <sup>25</sup> But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

## Christians are called “through the word”:

**2 Thessalonians 2:13-15** – <sup>13</sup> But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. <sup>14</sup> To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter.

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NOTE: 2 Thessalonians 2:13 explains how Christians will be saved: through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. God chose to select those who would become sanctified by the Spirit and believe in the truth.

## God’s word is the source of our salvation.

### **Psalms 119:41-48**

41 Let thy steadfast love come to me, O Lord,  
thy salvation according to thy promise;  
42 then shall I have an answer for those who taunt me,  
for I trust in thy word.  
43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,  
for my hope is in thy ordinances.  
44 I will keep thy law continually,  
for ever and ever;  
45 and I shall walk at liberty,  
for I have sought thy precepts.  
46 I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings,  
and shall not be put to shame;  
47 for I find my delight in thy commandments,  
which I love.  
48 I revere thy commandments, which I love,  
and I will meditate on thy statutes.



## Terms and Definitions

**Efficacious** - capable of having the desired result or effect; effective as a means, measure, remedy, etc.

**Effectual** – (typically of something inanimate or abstract) successful in producing a desired or intended result; effective.

## Terms Used to Describe the Doctrine:

**Efficacious Grace**

**Effectual Calling**

More descriptive as they indicate the intended message of those who teach this doctrine, i.e. their view of the role of the Holy Spirit in man's salvation.

**Efficacious Call of the Spirit**

**Transformed by the Holy Spirit**

## According to “[www.gotquestions.org...](http://www.gotquestions.org...)”

“The doctrine of irresistible grace accurately summarizes what the Bible teaches about the nature of saving faith as well as what must happen to overcome man’s depraved nature. Since natural man is dead in his trespasses and sins, it stands to reason that he must be regenerated before he can respond to the outward call of the gospel. Until that happens, man will resist the gospel message and the grace of God; however, once he has been “born again” and has a heart that is now inclined toward God, the grace of God will irresistibly draw Him to put his faith in Christ and be saved. **These two acts (regeneration and faith) cannot be separated from one another. They are so closely connected that we often cannot distinguish between them.**”

### Does order matter?

The model according to Got Questions:

**First**, we are dead in our sins.

### Does order matter?

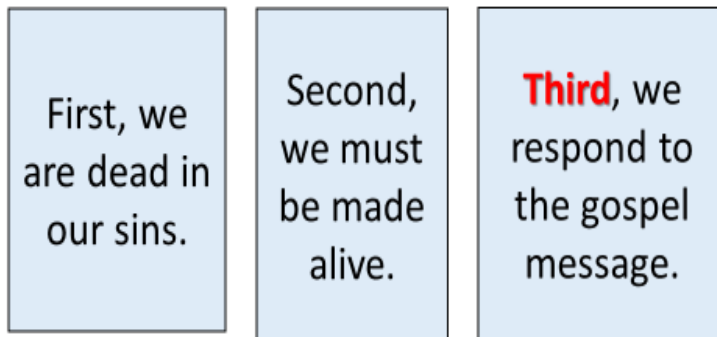
The model according to Got Questions:

First, we are dead in our sins.

**Second**, we must be made alive.

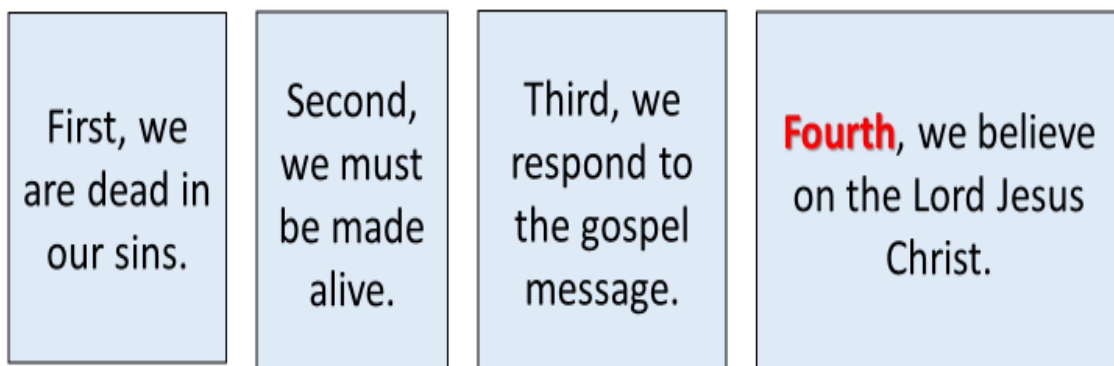
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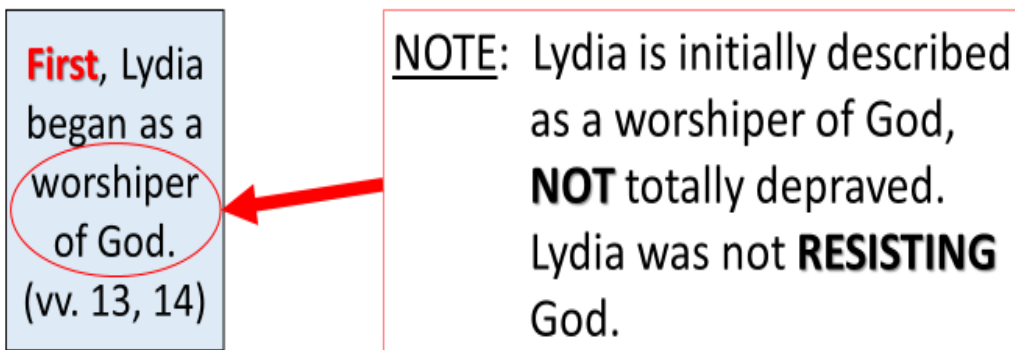


## The Conversion of Lydia

**Acts 16:11-15** <sup>11</sup> Setting sail therefore from Tro'as, we made a direct voyage to Sam'othrace, and the following day to Ne-ap'olis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is the leading city of the district of Macedo'nia, and a Roman colony. We remained in this city some days; <sup>13</sup> and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. <sup>14</sup> One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyati'ra, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to give heed to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she was baptized, with her household, she besought us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

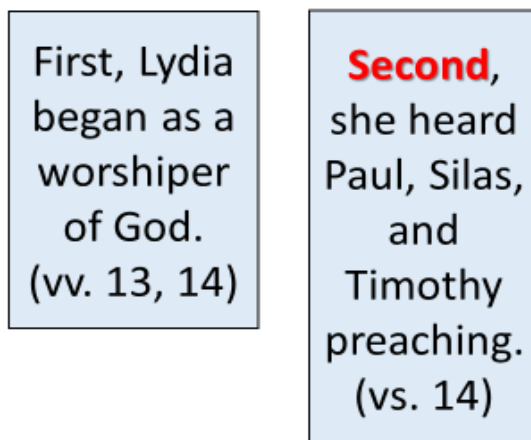
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The model according to **God's Word**:



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First, Lydia began as a worshiper of God. (vv. 13, 14)

Second, she heard Paul, Silas, and Timothy preaching. (vs. 14)

**Third**, her heart was opened and she gave heed to what Paul said (vs. 14)

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Third, her heart was opened and she gave heed to what Paul said (vs. 14)

**Fourth**, she responded and obeyed the Lord. She was baptized for the remission of her sins (vs. 15)

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

**Acts 8:26-40** <sup>26</sup> But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road. <sup>27</sup> And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Can'dace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup> And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

**Acts 8:26-40 (cont'd)** **31** And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this:

"As a sheep led to the slaughter  
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,  
so he opens not his mouth.

**33** In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who can describe his generation?  
For his life is taken up from the earth."

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

**Acts 8:26-40 (cont'd)** **34** And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?" **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. **36** And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?" **37**, And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." **38** And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip was found at Azo'tus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesare'a.

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

**First**, the eunuch was a worshiper of God. (vs. 27)

NOTE: The eunuch is initially described as a worshiper of God, **NOT** totally depraved. A totally depraved person would never read God's word or worship him. Got Questions says depraved sinners **RESIST!**

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

First, the eunuch was a worshiper of God. (vs. 27)

**Second**, he invited Philip to study God's word with him. (vs. 31)



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The model according to **God's Word**:

First, the eunuch was a worshiper of God.  
(vs. 27)

Second, he invited Philip to study God's word with him.  
(vs. 31)

**Third**, he believed the message he received.  
(vv. 36-37)

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

The model according to **God's Word**:

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(vs. 27)

Second, he invited Philip to study God's word with him.  
(vs. 31)

Third, he believed the message he received.  
(vv. 36-37)

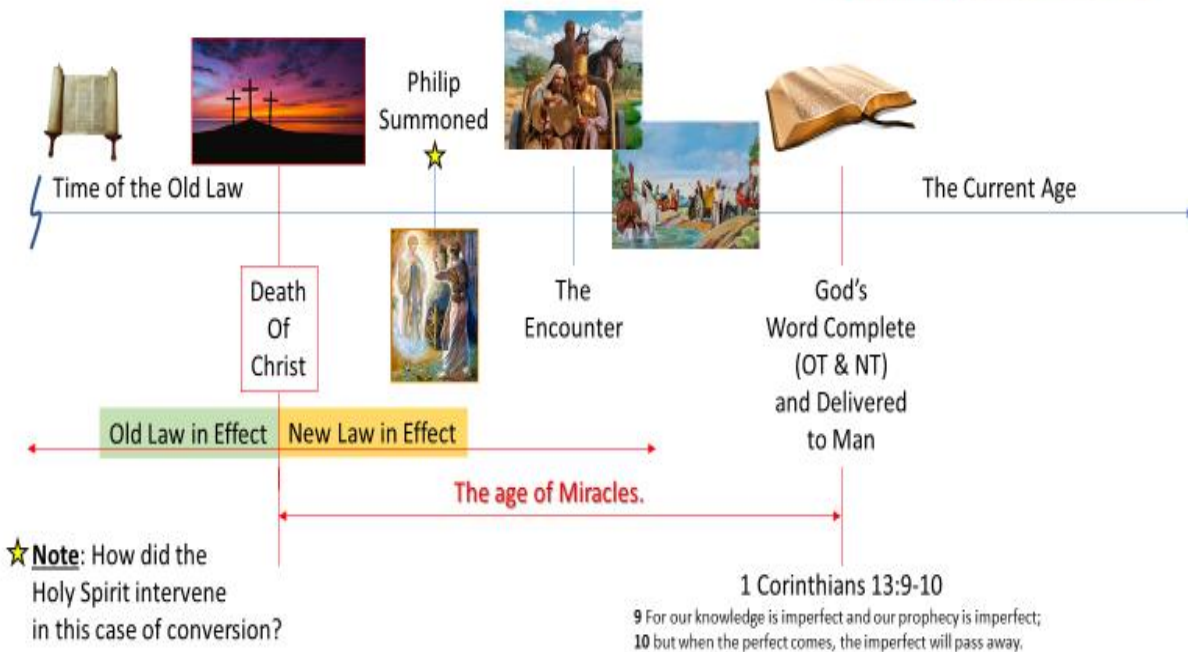
**Fourth**, he responded and obeyed the gospel. He was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins.  
(vs. 38)

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Important question regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in this case of conversion:

- Q.** Why did an angel of the Lord instruct Philip to “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”?  
If the role of the Holy Spirit is miraculous in the transformation of sinners why was an angel of the Lord engaged in this conversion?
- A.** See verses 30-35. The Eunuch’s transformation was due to **God’s word!**  
The Eunuch did not have the complete word to instruct him regarding how to obey the gospel. The Holy Spirit provided him with God’s word.

Consider this story within the context of time.



## Observation:

If, as the Calvinists teach, conversion of a sinner is by the “inward call” of the Holy Spirit, why was this case different than any other sinner? Following Calvinist reasoning, the Eunuch did not need Philip’s instruction.

The truth is that God’s word was being presented to the Eunuch so that he could make a choice!

## Observation:

Those who teach the doctrine of Irresistible Grace deny the power of the Holy Spirit by depicting Him as only capable of transforming man through miraculous intervention.

They reject the true Bible message that He delivered **God’s Word** to man and that, once properly received, **God’s Word** is fully capable, by it’s divine nature, of producing the transformation they describe.

## Romans 8:1-7

<sup>1</sup>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup>For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup>in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

## The Argument...

The “carnal mind,” possessed by those who are depraved, cannot understand, believe, or obey the spiritual law of God.

## The Answer according to Romans 8...

1. Consider the verse in context – verses 1-8.
  - a. Seen in the context is the free agency of man in choosing whether to obey or disobey God.
  - b. In reality, the passage is teaching a simple principle:
    - Those who are spiritually minded, those who have interest in spiritual things, will be obedient to the commands of God.
    - Those who are carnally minded , those who possess no interest in spiritual matters, will be disobedient.
2. God does not force anyone to accept or reject His will.

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## Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

**Irresistible Grace contradicts the Scriptural principle of free agency.**

1. This tenet of Calvinism declares that the grace of God cannot be rejected.
2. In contrast, the Bible plainly teaches that ones salvation is conditional based upon his obedience— that one can either reject or accept salvation as it is offered through Jesus Christ.
  - a. The grace of God has appeared to all people (**Titus 2:11**) and yet millions have rejected it.
  - b. Each person is accountable for his response to the gospel.  
(**John 12:47-48**)
  - c. Those who reject the teachings of Jesus are held responsible.  
(**John 5:24; 8:24**)

## Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

**Irresistible Grace contradicts the Scriptural principle of free agency.**

3. The Bible states that each individual is free to choose whether or not to take advantage of the grace of God. It clearly demonstrates one may resist God's grace as revealed in His word.

## Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

**Irresistible Grace mistakenly portrays how people are called by God to salvation.**

1. All people are called by the gospel. (**2 Thessalonians 2:14**)
2. The Bible does not say that people are called by some still, small voice or by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on them.
3. The Holy Spirit, in the conviction and conversion of the sinner, does not work apart from the word. (**Romans 1:16**)

## Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

**Irresistible Grace changes the order of belief and salvation.**

1. "A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved." (Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*)
2. In the Bible, salvation always follows belief, i.e., faith always precedes salvation.
  - a. **John 3:16**. Belief then salvation.
  - b. **Acts 16:31**. Belief then salvation.
  - c. **Mark 16:16**. Belief, baptism, then salvation.
  - d. **Hebrews 11:6**. One cannot be saved without faith, thus making it a condition of salvation and causing it to have to precede the salvation of one's soul.

## Scriptural Objections to Irresistible Grace

**Irresistible Grace has an erroneous view as to when one is made alive spiritually.**

The Bible teaches that one is made alive when, after hearing the gospel, he is baptized (**Col. 2:12,13; cf. John 3:3-5**).

## Conclusion

1. The Scriptures reveal we are saved by the grace of God. (**Eph. 2:8**)
2. However, using our freedom to choose, we accept this grace by our faith not because God forces us to accept it. (**Rev. 22:17**)

## YES TO GRACE; NO TO IRRESISTIBLE GRACE/MONERGISM

Even though I had proven to him that my theology, classical Arminianism, does *not* say persons save themselves through their good works or contribute anything meritorious to their salvation, my Calvinist interlocutor wasn't convinced. "Your theology," he accused, "is still semi-Pelagian if not fully Pelagian."

Somewhat offended because I regard these as heresies, I asked him to explain more fully. I thought he had come to realize Arminians *do not* believe in works righteousness and *do* believe salvation is all of grace and has nothing to do with meritorious works. But he responded: "Because you make the decisive factor in salvation your own free will decision."

At that time, years ago, I had never heard that accusation, but I knew for sure that no Arminian says that. When pressed, my Calvinist friend said: "You see, if salvation isn't all God's work and has nothing whatever to do with anything we do, it isn't by grace and it isn't a gift. By making it dependent on the person's free acceptance of God's grace, you make salvation a good work and therefore not a gift; and that contradicts Ephesians 2:8–9." I've encountered this accusation against Arminianism (and all non-Calvinist theologies) many times since. Somehow this notion that non-Calvinists make their free will decision the "decisive factor in salvation" has become a mantra for many Calvinists.

While I do think this specific charge has a suitable answer (which I will explain below), the underlying issue in this conversation was really about grace as either resistible or irresistible. Close examination suggests this is exactly the issue underlying the charge that Arminianism amounts to "works-righteousness." How does the saving grace of God bring the benefit of Christ's atoning death, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and justification into a person's life? Is it a gift imposed or a gift freely received?

The Calvinist view is called *monergism*—from two Greek words that mean "one" and "energy" or "action." Monergism is the belief that salvation is all God's doing from beginning to end without any cooperation from the person being saved other than what God instills in that person. The alternative is "synergism"—the belief that salvation is all of grace but requires free cooperation for it to be activated in a person's life.

### THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE OR EFFECTUAL GRACE/MONERGISM

There's a reason why the "I" follows the T, the U, and the L in TULIP, and it's not just because that's how the flower is spelled. For Calvinists, irresistible grace, which many prefer to call "effectual grace," is both biblical and logically necessary because of total depravity, unconditional election, and limited atonement. For biblical support they usually point to John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." They interpret "draws" as "compels" but without the connotation of external force against the person's will. In other words, God bends the elect person's will so that he or she *wants* to come to Jesus with repentance and faith.

As for logic, the argument is that because people are totally depraved and dead in trespasses and sins, unless God elects him or her, the person will never respond to the internal calling of the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit has to change the person inwardly in an effectual manner, which is regeneration. Then the born again person desires to come to Christ, in which case he or she is given repentance and faith (conversion) and justification (forgiveness and imputation of Christ's righteousness). This process is called "monergistic grace" or just "monergism."



Reformed theologian Henry Meeter, in *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, defines monergism this way:

One might say, *God planned salvation, and he earned it in Christ*. Now the choice of acceptance or rejection is mine alone. In a sense it is so. But who causes a Christian to accept Christ? “For we are all gone astray. There is none that seeketh after God.” So Christ sends the Holy Spirit into our stubborn hearts, regenerates us, and puts faith and love to God there, as well as new ambitions and desires. This he does with irresistible power—not, as the Arminians say, if we let him; we would never spontaneously let him. We only work out our own salvation because it is God that worketh in us.... Thus, the entire work of redemption in its essentials is the work of God. God the Father planned it. God the Son earned it. And God the Holy Spirit applies it, regenerating heart and life.

Whether Meeter has Arminianism right is debatable, and I have challenged similar descriptions in my *Arminian Theology*. Nevertheless, his is a clear and concise expression of the monergism universally held and taught among Calvinists.

The point is that, for the Calvinist, any contribution that the human person makes to his or her salvation is really, however unnoticed, a work of God in him or her. Meeter partially quotes Philippians 2:12, which says: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” Verse 13, which Meeter omits (possibly by mistake), says, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” For him and all Calvinists whom I have encountered, what Paul meant is this: “If you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling, remember it is God doing it all in and through you.” Only in this way can all glory for salvation be given to God alone.

Did Calvin believe in monergistic grace? That he did is revealed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* where he referred to the “inner call.” He declared: “The manner of the call itself clearly indicates that it depends on grace alone.” He continues:

Even the very nature and dispensation of the call clearly demonstrates [that] it consists not only in the preaching of the Word but also in the illumination of the Spirit.... When he first shines with the light of His word upon the undeserving, he thereby shows a sufficiently clear proof of his free goodness. Here, then, God’s boundless goodness is already manifesting itself but not to the salvation of all; for a heavier judgment remains upon the wicked because they reject the testimony of God’s love. [Of course, Calvin has previously made clear that this is because they were predestined to do so!] And God also, to show forth his glory, withdraws the effectual working of his Spirit from them. This inner call, then, is a pledge of salvation that cannot deceive us.... But lest the flesh boast that it did at least answer him when he called and freely offered himself, he declares that it has no ears to hear, no eyes to see, unless he makes them. Furthermore, he makes them not according to each person’s gratefulness but according to his election.

Here Calvin clearly expresses monergism or irresistible grace. God “makes” the elected sinner’s ears to hear and eyes to see the gospel, and he “withdraws” that “effectual working” (irresistible grace) from the non-elect, the reprobate.

As I will explain later, most Calvinists claim that synergists want to be able to boast, even if just a little, that they contributed something to their salvation and/or are so in love with free will that they cannot bring themselves to accept that God does everything in salvation and they contribute nothing. That does not reflect the real statements made by synergists, however. The fact is, most synergists object to monergism because of the necessary implication stated plainly by Calvin that it requires God to withhold or withdraw monergistic grace from many of the very

people he created in his own image and likeness to their eternal damnation and suffering “for his glory.” This Calvin states clearly about the reprobate: “They are raised up to the end that through them God’s glory may be revealed.” Lest anyone misunderstand the source of their reprobation: “For when it says that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will.”<sup>4</sup> The *sole reason* non-Calvinist evangelical Christians object to monergism is because it makes God the ultimate, even if indirect, cause of the reprobates’ unbelief and damnation. It does serious harm to God’s reputation.

Lorraine Boettner follows Calvin closely by attributing everything in salvation to God to the exclusion of any free human cooperation with grace. He bases this on the doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election. “If man is dead in sin, then nothing short of . . . supernatural life-giving power of the Holy Spirit will ever cause him to do that which is spiritually good.” So, regeneration must precede conversion: “Regeneration is a sovereign gift of God, graciously bestowed on those whom He has chosen.”<sup>6</sup> It involves a fundamental change of character so that the person regenerated wants to repent and believe and serve God. Boettner avers that this doctrine of irresistible grace is *the only* evangelical theology because only it ascribes all the work of salvation to God, thus giving God alone the glory. Arminianism is not evangelical, he claims, because it makes man and not God “ultimately the deciding factor” in salvation.<sup>8</sup> This is why he and other Calvinists attack Arminian theology as “man-centered” rather than “God-centered.”

One has to wonder, however, who is the God at the center of this theology. Boettner admits that God could save everyone, because election to salvation is unconditional and regeneration and faith are solely gifts of God given only to the elect: “But for reasons which have been only partially revealed, He leaves many impenitent.” While non-Calvinists are willing to admit that high Calvinism is God-centered, they have good reason to wonder how exactly to distinguish between the God it centers itself on and Satan—except that Satan wants all people damned to hell and God wants only a certain number damned to hell. That may sound harsh, but it is the reason most Christians are not Calvinists. And it is no less harsh than Calvinists’ frequent accusation that Arminians (and other non-Calvinists) place man, not God, at the center of their theology because they want to boast and rob God of his rightful glory.

Ironically and confusingly, Boettner goes on to claim that monergism involves no violation of the sinner’s free agency. “This change [viz., regeneration] is not accomplished through any external compulsion but through a new principle of life which has been created within the soul and which seeks after the food which alone can satisfy it [viz., God’s word].” Then he compounds the confusion by saying that “the elect are so influenced by divine power that their coming is an act of voluntary choice.”<sup>11</sup> One can only wonder what “voluntary choice” means in this context; I assume Boettner is referring to the compatibilist freedom of Edwards and other Calvinists—freedom compatible with determinism.

Steele and Thomas weigh in on this doctrine that they call “the efficacious call of the Spirit”: “Simply stated, this doctrine asserts that the Holy Spirit never fails to bring to salvation those sinners whom He personally calls to Christ. He inevitably applies salvation to every sinner whom He intends to save, and it is His intention to save all the elect.” Like Calvin, Boettner, and most Calvinists, they distinguish between a “general, outer call” of the gospel, which is a universal invitation to all people to be saved, and a “special, inward call” that goes out only to the elect and effects their regeneration before they respond with repentance and faith. This special call is irresistible: “The grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ.” For biblical support Steele and Thomas turn to Romans 8:30: “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those

he justified, he also glorified.” The omission of 8:29 appears convenient to their purpose of showing God utterly and solely responsible for regeneration. That verse says: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” There election is based on God’s foreknowledge—something Calvinists reject as an error. Also, verse 30 says nothing at all about grace being irresistible. Moreover, Paul skips over regeneration to justification. This verse, in its context and not treated eisegetically (reading meanings into a text that are not there), does not support irresistible grace.

Calvinist Palmer agrees entirely with Calvin, Boettner, and Steele and Thomas about irresistible grace, and for the same reasons; but he emphasizes more the active response to grace that is necessary on the elect person’s part if he or she is to be saved. As we have already seen, like some Calvinists, Palmer revels in paradox. Here is another case:

Although it is true that none would be saved were it not for the irresistible grace of God, no one may ever fall into the rationalistic trap of saying that he has nothing to do. He may not reason that since all depends on the Holy Spirit, he does not need to believe; or that he must simply wait for the Spirit to move him, and there is nothing that he can do to be saved.

This warning sounds Calvinist and Arminian at the same time; Palmer apparently wants to have his cake and eat it too. Note especially the final words of his statement where he warns against believing there is nothing a person can do to be saved. Afterwards he writes: “If you do [believe], thank God for causing you to do so.” So, on the one hand, God “causes” the elect person to believe, and we are forbidden to suggest that is in any way an act of free will.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, we are forbidden to suggest there is nothing a person can do to be saved. These ideas are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

R. C. Sproul also champions irresistible grace: “God unilaterally and monergistically does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.” He prefers to call it “effectual grace” lest anyone misunderstand by thinking that in this belief God forces someone to be saved against his or her will. Rather, God graciously imparts the gift of faith so that the person wants to believe: “The faith by which we [the elect] are saved is a gift. When the apostle says [in Eph. 2:8–9] it is not of ourselves, he does not mean it is not our faith. Again, God does not do the believing for us. It is our own faith but it does not originate with us. It is given to us. The gift is not earned or deserved. It is a gift of sheer grace.” Also, “the whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens someone to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in his irresistible sweetness.”<sup>19</sup>

For Sproul, then, God “monergistically and unilaterally” saves the elect person by giving him or her the gift of faith, which then is the person’s own faith *and* God regenerates the person so that they, for the first time, see Jesus “in his irresistible sweetness.” All this without violating the person’s will. Like Boettner, Sproul regards irresistible grace or effectual calling as an even more basic and fundamental issue of Protestant (and therefore evangelical) theology than justification by faith alone. After all, he argues, if a person contributes anything to salvation, including a bare permission to allow God to work, then justification is not solely by grace alone. The issue of the graciousness of salvation is more important because it is more basic than the issue of salvation by faith alone. “Here we reach the ultimate point of separation between semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism, between Arminianism and Calvinism, between Rome and the Reformation.”

Notice how Sproul is putting Arminianism, by which he means any Protestant view other than high Calvinism, on the side of “Rome”—meaning Roman Catholicism—over against the Reformation. What he is saying here is that Arminianism (i.e., any view other than his) is not really

Protestant and therefore not really evangelical either. I live in Texas and around here we might say, “Them’s fightin’ words!” Seriously, one has to wonder why Sproul would be so blatantly offensive to fellow Protestant Christians, including everyone in the Wesleyan tradition, all Pentecostals, many if not most Baptists, and many other evangelical Christians who, for very good reasons, do not accept his point of view.

Sproul continues:

In the Reformation view, the work of regeneration is performed by God and by him alone. The sinner is completely passive in receiving this action. Regeneration is an example of operative grace. Any cooperation we display toward God occurs only *after* the work of regeneration has been completed.

The only support Sproul gives for his claim that this is “the Reformation view” is Luther’s vicious response to Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) entitled *On the Bondage of the Will*. There, admittedly, Luther expressed this view. Does that make it “the Reformation view”? Hardly. Luther’s right-hand man, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), was more of a synergist, agreeing with Erasmus that salvation involves some cooperation with God’s grace by the human person even though he adamantly insisted there is no merit in this cooperation. Reformation Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528) and Menno Simons (1496–1561) emphasized free will over against monergistic grace. For Sproul to pit his monergistic view of salvation as the only Protestant one over against all others as Roman Catholic is misleading at best and disingenuous at worst.

John Piper can be counted on to agree with Calvin, Boettner, Steele and Thomas, Palmer, and Sproul. Diving into paradox with them, he writes: “God will see to it that his elect hear the invitation and respond the way they should.... But he does not do this in a way that lessens our accountability to hear and believe.” He also argues that irresistible grace, together with unconditional election, forms the only reasonable motive for intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare. That is because, he argues, there is no point in praying for the salvation of the lost or the defeat of Satan, who he admits is “the god of this world,” unless God intervenes powerfully to make these things happen. If people have free will, Piper argues, there is no point in praying for their salvation or that they not support Satan in his “devastation” of the world. “Either you give up praying for God to convert sinners or you give up ultimate human self-determination.”<sup>24</sup>

Of course, anyone can see the profound irony in such claims. Elsewhere Piper has stated unequivocally that God ordains, governs, and even causes everything that happens. Whatever is the case, God has foreordained it. If he responds to a prayer—for example, for the salvation of a lost loved one—it is because he has foreordained it. The prayer does not actually change anything; it is simply a foreordained means to a foreordained end. Piper is a divine determinist, whether he likes that label or not. So what role does prayer or spiritual warfare really play in his theology? Certainly not that they can actually bring it about that God acts in any other way than he already planned to act and necessarily will act.

### **MORE INJURY TO GOD’S REPUTATION**

In the next section of this chapter, “Alternatives to Irresistible Grace/Monergism,” I will show that many of the accusations by Calvinists such as Sproul against non-Calvinist and especially Arminian views miss their targets entirely. In this section, I want once again to expose the fallacies of the Calvinist arguments for monergism and demonstrate that monergism actually injures God’s reputation by necessarily undermining God’s goodness and love.

I begin with refutations of typical Calvinist interpretations of Scriptures that supposedly require monergism. The most important such verses are John 6:44 and 65, where Jesus says that no one comes to him unless the Father “draws” him. Sproul and other Calvinists argue that the Greek verb here translated “draw” always and only means “compels.” In a brilliant but unpublished 2003 paper entitled “The ‘Drawings’ of God,” pastor-theologian Steve Witzki conclusively proves that Sproul is wrong. He cites numerous Greek lexicons saying that the Greek word does not always mean “compels” but often means “draw, attract.”

Sproul cites a reference work many consider definitive in matters of interpreting the Greek New Testament—Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*—to support his definition of the term throughout the New Testament, including John 6:44 and cognate passages. However, Witzki quotes Kittel as allowing a broader range of possible meanings. With reference to John 6:44 and 12:32 the author of Kittel’s article (Albrecht Oepke) writes:

There is no thought here of force or magic. The term figuratively expresses the supernatural power of the love of God or Christ which goes out to all ... but without which no one can come.... The apparent contradiction shows that both the election and the universality of grace must be taken seriously; the compulsion is not automatic.

The most devastating argument against Sproul’s case that the term always means “compels” is John 12:32. There Jesus says that if he is lifted up from the earth, he will “draw all people” to himself. The Greek verb translated “draw” there is the same as in John 6:44 and 65. If Sproul is right and the verb must always mean “compel,” then this verse teaches universalism. In fact, however, the word *can mean* simply draw or attract rather than compel or drag. The Arminian interpretation of these verses in John 6 and 12 is reasonable: that nobody can come to Jesus Christ unless he or she is drawn by God’s prevenient grace that calls and enables but does not compel.

Are there Scriptures that contradict irresistible grace? Steve Lemke marshals many passages that disprove it. For example, Matthew 23 and Luke 13 describe Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:37–39)

Lemke rightly notes that if Calvinism is correct, “Jesus’ lament would have been over God’s hardness of heart.” There are so many passages like this throughout the Bible, where God or Jesus or a prophet decries the people’s hardness of heart sorrowfully as if it could be otherwise. If irresistible grace were true, of course, Jesus could have simply drawn the people of Jerusalem effectually to himself. Why didn’t he if he was so sorrowful about their rejection? And why would he be sorrowful about their rejection if it, like everything else, was foreordained by God?

The usual Calvinist response to these passages is that God is sorrowful over people’s hardness of heart and rejection of him. That he doesn’t do anything about it can only be because he chooses not to, and that he chooses not to can only be because his strongest motive (Edwards’ definition of free will) is not to. In brief, he doesn’t want to but wishes he could. The only hint Calvinists give us as to why God doesn’t do what he wishes is “for his glory.” What kind of God is glorified by people rejecting him when he chooses not to overcome that rejection when he could?

Moreover, why would God be sad or sorrowful about what glorifies him? What possible analogy could there be to this in human experience? Suppose a father has a love potion that would cause all of his children to love him and never rebel against him. He gives it to some of his children but not others and then weeps because some of his children reject him and don’t love him. Who

would take him seriously? Or, if they took him seriously, who wouldn't think him insincere or a bit mad? Lemke concludes from the story of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem:

If Jesus believed in irresistible grace, with both the outward and inward calls, His apparent lament over Jerusalem would have been just a disingenuous act, a cynical show because He knew that God had not and would not give these lost persons the necessary conditions for their salvation.

Another interesting biblical passage mentioned by Lemke is Matthew 19:24, where Jesus says to his disciples: "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." What sense does this verse make in light of irresistible grace? Is Jesus saying it is harder *for God* to save a rich man than a poor one? How could that be? If everyone, without exception, only gets into the kingdom of God by God's work alone without any required cooperation on his or her part, then Jesus' saying makes no sense at all. Again, Lemke's comment is spot on:

Of course, if Jesus were a Calvinist, He never would have suggested that it was harder for rich persons to be saved by God's irresistible grace than poor persons. Their wills would be changed immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call. It would be no harder for a rich person to be saved by God's monergistic and irresistible calling than it would be for any other sinner. But the real Jesus was suggesting that their salvation was tied in some measure to their response and commitment to His calling.

Lemke also points to the numerous all-inclusive invitations for people to come to God and to Christ in Scripture, especially to the already discussed "all" passages that express God's desire for everyone to be saved and none to perish (Matt. 18:14; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2). As I have already shown, these cannot be interpreted as referring only to some people.

Most devastatingly of all, Lemke rightly points out that "the Calvinists essentially blame God for those who do not come [to salvation]." After all, while they would say that those who reject the gospel merely receive their just deserts when they are condemned, "there is really more to it than that. Calvinists say that God elected some to glory for His own reasons from before the world began, and He gave them irresistible grace through His Spirit so they inevitably would be saved." This is the main point against this doctrine of Calvinism (as it is the main point against all of them!). It portrays God as a respecter of persons because he chooses some to save irresistibly and others not to receive that crucial gift, with the result that they are damned forever. That they deserve condemnation is not the issue. The issue is that *everyone* deserves it, but God is selective about saving some irresistibly and leaving others to die an eternal separation from him in hell. Calvinists offer no reason for this other than "God's good pleasure" and/or "God's glory."

Yet, all Calvinists claim that God is good and loving. What goodness and love is this? In fact, to put it bluntly, Calvinism necessarily implies, whether any Calvinist would say so or not, that God requires a better quality of love from us than he himself exercises! In Luke 6:35 and parallel passages Jesus commands us to love our enemies; there is no hint of any exception. But according to Calvinism, God doesn't do that. Of course, some Calvinists insist that God *does* love even his reprobate enemies. But there is no analogy to *that* kind of love in human experience. It would be a love in which a person could rescue some from terrible deaths but chooses not to in order to show how great he is. Is there any analogy to this "goodness" and "love" in human experience? If not, then I suggest, with Paul Helm, it is meaningless.

Walls and Dongell offer an analogy to test whether any human being would be considered loving or good if he or she acted as Calvinism says God acts in giving irresistible grace only to some of his fallen human creatures. (Remember, he created all in his own image and likeness.) In

their illustration, a doctor discovers a cure for a deadly disease killing a group of camp children and gives it to the camp's director. The director administers it to some sick children so that they are cured and withholds it from others so that they die terribly. He has no shortage of the cure; nothing at all hinders him from curing all the children. Even though some of the children resisted the cure, the director had the ability to persuade all of them to take it; he only persuaded some. When the parents confront the director, he passionately contends that he loved all the children—even the ones who died. He cared for them while they were sick and made them as comfortable as possible. Walls and Dongell rightly conclude:

The director's claim to love all the children rings hollow at best, deceptive at worst. If love will not employ all available means to rescue someone from ultimate loss, it is hard to hear it as love at all. In our judgment, it becomes meaningless to claim that God wishes to save all while also insisting that God refrains from making the salvation of all possible. What are we to make of a God whose walk does not match his talk?

The plain fact of the matter is that the doctrine of irresistible grace, *without universal salvation which most Calvinists reject*, leads to the "good and necessary consequence" that God is not good and not loving. Now, of course, no Calvinist would admit that! But their teaching should lead a thinking person to that conclusion. And what they say is inconsistent and therefore highly problematic, if not downright incoherent. When I hear or read a high Calvinist saying that God loves everyone and is a good God, I really have no idea what that means.

Another problem with irresistible grace is that personal relationships require mutuality. Dutch philosopher-theologian Vincent Brümmer has demonstrated this conclusively in his *Speaking of a Personal God*, where he presents a step-by-step logical argument that mutuality, in the sense of free response that is resistible, is part of any personal relationship. Without freedom of will, which includes ability to resist, a person's acts are not really "acts" at all but "events." By definition, realization of a personal relationship requires free acts of both parties toward the other:

For the realization of a *personal relationship* the initiative of *both* partners in the relationship is necessary. Given that both partners in such a relationship are persons, both have by definition the freedom of will, by which it must be *factually possible* for both of them to say "no" to the other and so to prevent the relationship from coming into existence. It is only by means of the "yes" of one partner that the other receives the freedom of ability to realize the relationship. In this respect personal relationships are symmetrical and differ from purely causal relationships which are asymmetrical, because only one partner (the cause) can be the initiator. The other partner in a purely causal relationship is an object of causal manipulation and therefore lacks the freedom of will to be able to say "no" with respect to what happens to him or her.

Brümmer argues further that in our relationship with God, God can be the initiator and must be because of our lack of "freedom of ability" due to our sinfulness. However, "a personal relationship with God assumes that the human partner also remains a person in the relationship and that his or her free choice is equally a necessary condition for the relationship to be brought about." Finally, Brümmer negates the idea of irresistible grace by saying that even

God cannot bring about our choice without it ceasing to be ours. By definition, a *personal* relationship with God cannot be factually unavoidable for the human partner. For this reason the doctrine of factual irresistibility excludes a personal relationship between God and human persons.

It doesn't take a philosopher to establish these facts; they are common sense. But it helps for a philosopher to support them. And it won't do for Calvinists to complain about critics appealing to

philosophy; they are good at using philosophy when it helps their arguments. Common sense alone dictates that a truly personal relationship always involves free will; insofar as one party controls the other such that the other has no real choice whether to be in the relationship or not, it is not a real relationship. It makes no difference that both parties *want* to be in the relationship. Imagine a friendship where one person has manipulated the other one into being his friend. Perhaps he has plied him with money or even given him a drug that makes him friendly. Any objective observer of such a “friendship” would say it is really not a legitimate friendship—at least not a healthy one. Mutual, informed consent is a prerequisite to any good relationship. But Brümmer doesn’t leave the matter there. He aims his critique straight at high Calvinism’s notion of salvation itself. Referring to high Calvinism with the metonymy of “Dordt” (referring to the 1618/1619 Synod of Dort) he says:

It strikes me that the difficulties here have their source in the fact that the Dordt theologians did not view human salvation in terms of a personal *relationship* with God but in terms of a reborn *condition* in us. The only question then concerns the *cause* of this condition: is it God or us, grace or human will?

But when salvation is regarded not as a mere causal condition but also, and even more, as a personal relationship, as most evangelicals do regard it, the idea that it can be founded on *both* grace *and* human will (with grace having priority) is compelling.

I will round out this description and critique of Calvinism’s doctrine of irresistible grace, monergism, with an appropriate quote from Vernon Grounds, an evangelical theologian who agrees completely with Brümmer: “God deals personally with personal beings.... Grace that left no option whatever would not be grace, it would be something else. We should have to say, ‘By force were ye saved, and not of yourselves.’ ”

## **ALTERNATIVES TO IRRESISTIBLE GRACE/MONERGISM**

Now I will tackle some of the objections to “evangelical synergism” raised by Calvinists. By “evangelical synergism” I mean roughly Arminian theology, although many who hold this view of salvation do *not* wish to be called Arminians. I respect that while also respectfully asking them to consider whether the label may be more appropriate than they think.

Over the centuries Calvinist theologians, by sheer repetition and misrepresentation, have brought about a situation where the term “Arminian” is widely thought of as designating a heresy. I have demonstrated conclusively in my *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* that it is *not* what they say. For example, contrary to Sproul and other misinformed or disingenuous Calvinist critics, it is not semi-Pelagian. Semi-Pelagianism is the heresy that says the initiative in salvation is ours, the human person’s, and not God’s. Arminianism has always insisted that the initiative in salvation is God’s; it is called “prevenient grace,” and it is enabling but resistible. It would come as a shock to many Calvinists to know how much of salvation and the whole Christian life both Arminius and Wesley attributed to grace—all of it.

But Arminian theology assumes, because the Bible everywhere assumes, that God limits himself out of love so that his initiating, enabling grace is resistible. It is powerful and persuasive but not compelling in the determinative sense. It leaves the sinner a person, not an object. Baptist theologian Robert E. Picirilli says:

What Arminius meant by “prevenient grace” was that grace that precedes actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads on to regeneration. He was quick to observe



that this “assistance of the Holy Spirit” is of such sufficiency “as to keep at the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism.”

Another Baptist theologian, Stanley J. Grenz, was an Arminian without labeling himself such. In his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, he describes prevenient grace in three ways: as illuminating, as convicting, and as calling and enabling. He makes clear it is always resistible because it comes to persons and not machines through the hearing of God’s Word. The point here is simply this: Arminian theology (and many non-Calvinist theologies that are not so labeled)<sup>46</sup> places the initiative in salvation and all the work of salvation squarely on the divine side of the equation. God’s grace is the effectual cause of salvation, but the human person’s faith as response to prevenient grace is the instrumental cause of salvation. What is that faith? Simply trusting God; it is not a “good work” or anything meritorious of which the saved sinner could boast. But what about the Calvinist attacks on Arminian theology as a form of self-salvation and works righteousness akin to (they would say) Roman Catholic theology? Knowledgeable Calvinists do not say that Arminians believe they have to work for their salvation; they say that Arminians and other non-Calvinists make the human decision of faith the “decisive factor” in salvation and therefore bring it back, however unintentionally, to salvation by good works.

To Arminians, however, this accusation is ridiculous. Imagine a student who is starving and about to be evicted from his room due to lack of money. A kindly professor *gives* him a check for \$1,000—enough to pay his rent and stock his kitchen with food. Imagine further that the rescued student takes the check to his bank, endorses it, and deposits it in his account (which brings his balance up to \$1,000). Imagine also that the student then goes around campus boasting that he *earned* \$1,000. What would everyone’s response be who knew the truth of the situation? They would accuse the student of being an ungrateful wretch. But suppose the student said, “But my endorsing the check and depositing it was the decisive factor in my having the money, so I did a good work that earned at least part of the money, didn’t I?” He would be ridiculed and possibly even ostracized for such nonsense.

In what situation in human experience is merely *accepting* a gift “the decisive factor” in having it? It is *a* factor, yes—but hardly the decisive one. Merely accepting a gift does not give one the right to boast. Oh, but the Calvinist will say, the student in the above illustration *could* boast *if* the professor offered a similar gift of money to *other* starving students and they rejected it. He could boast that in some way he is better than they are. I doubt it. He might try, but who would believe him? People would say to him: “Stop trying to take some credit for being rescued! That others didn’t accept the money and were evicted and are begging for food on the street says nothing at all about you. Give all the credit where it belongs—to the kindly professor.” Who can really argue with that?

Why do Arminians and other non-Calvinists reject irresistible grace? Because they love free will and don’t want to give all the glory to God, as some Calvinists suggest? Not at all. That’s a calumny unworthy of anyone who has bothered to study the matter. Every Arminian from Arminius to the present has always made clear the real motive behind rejecting the doctrine of irresistible grace: preserving the good and loving character of God. Of course, *if* a person could be a universalist, there would be no necessary obstacle to irresistible grace except possibly the one raised above about the nature of personal relationships. However, *if* the only possible way in which people could be saved was for God to overwhelm them and compel them to accept his mercy, I would have no fundamental objection to believing in it *so long as God did it for everyone*. Fortunately, there is another way: prevenient grace. And since I cannot believe in universal

salvation, that is the only alternative to monergism that preserves God’s character of perfect love, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Another common Calvinist objection to evangelical synergism/Arminianism is that it does not take human depravity seriously enough. After all, Calvinists aver, fallen human persons are literally dead in trespasses and sins. Their only hope is for God to resuscitate them. Indeed, but God’s resuscitation does not include leaving them no option whether to accept him or not. Actually, Arminians and other synergists *do* believe that prevenient grace restores life to the person dead in trespasses and sins. However, it does not compel them to accept God’s mercy unto salvation, which requires free repentance and faith (conversion).

So, in Arminian theology, a partial regeneration does precede conversion, but it is not a complete regeneration. It is an awakening and enabling, but not an irresistible force. This is how evangelical synergists interpret the “drawings” of John’s gospel, including Jesus’ words about drawing all people to himself if he be lifted up. In fact, *only* this interpretation of these drawings keeps them together meaning the same thing—God’s powerful attracting and persuading power that actually imparts free will to be saved or not. Being saved is not a matter of doing a work; it is only a matter of *not resisting*. When a person decides to allow God’s grace to save, he or she repents and trusts only and completely in Christ. That is a passive act; it could be compared to a drowning person who decides to relax and let his rescuer save him from drowning.

This is how Arminians/evangelical synergists understand Philippians 2:12–13 quoted earlier. The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells his Christian readers to remember to “work out” their salvation “with fear and trembling.” Critics think Arminians and evangelical synergists generally stop there and ignore the next verse. But they don’t. They realize and teach that *if* people are working out their salvation, from beginning to end, it is only because “God is at work” in them. That’s prevenient, assisting grace: prevenient leading up to conversion and assisting throughout the entire Christian life. But it would be pointless for Paul to urge his readers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling if God were doing everything and they did not even have to cooperate by allowing God’s grace to work in them.

I ask the reader’s indulgence as I close this chapter by providing two rather homely illustrations of evangelical synergism that I believe do more justice to the biblical text and Christian experience *and the character of God* than Calvinist images and analogies. First, imagine a deep pit with steep, slippery sides. Several people are lying broken and wounded, utterly helpless, at the bottom of the pit.

- *Semi-Pelagianism* says that God comes along and throws a rope down to the bottom of the pit and waits for a person to start pulling on it. Once he does, God responds by yelling, “Grab it tight and wrap it around yourself. Together we’ll get you out.” The problem is, the person is too hurt to do that, the rope is too weak, and God is too good to wait for the person to initiate the process.
- *Monergism* says God comes along, throws a rope down into the pit, and climbs down it, wrapping it around *some* of the people and then goes back out of the pit and pulls them to safety without any cooperation. The problem is that the God of Jesus Christ is too good and loving to rescue only some of the helpless people.
- *Evangelical synergism* says that God comes along and throws a rope down and yells, “Grab onto it and pull and together we’ll get you out!” Nobody moves. They are too wounded. In fact, for all practical purposes they are “dead” because they are utterly helpless. So God pours water into the pit and yells, “Relax and let the water lift you out!” In other words,

“Float!” All a person in the pit has to do to be rescued is let the water lift him or her out of the pit. It takes a decision, but not an effort. The water, of course, is prevenient grace.

Second, here is an illustration of grace and “working out your salvation” throughout the Christian life. During the hot summers I have to water my plants often. So I go to the outdoor faucet where the hose is attached, turn it on all the way, and then walk to the end of the hose and drag it around the side of the house to water a bush. Invariably when I get to the bush and press the handle of the attachment at the end of the hose, nothing comes out. I go back to the faucet and discover everything’s fine there. The water pressure is strong; the water is flowing into the hose full force. Ah, I realize, there’s a kink in the hose. So I go and find the kink that is keeping the water inside the hose from flowing and work it out.

In this illustration, the water represents God’s assisting grace; it is always “full force” in a Christian’s life. There are no “grace boosters.” Grace is full and free from conversion and regeneration on into the life of sanctification. But if I am not experiencing the flow of God’s grace in confidence and power for service, it isn’t due to any lack of grace; it is due to kinks in the hose of my life. What are the kinks? Attitudes, besetting sins, lack of prayer. All I have to do is decide to remove those kinks and the grace that is already there is allowed to flow.

This is an imperfect illustration of Philippians 2:12–13 from an evangelical synergist perspective. The one alteration needed to make the illustration really “work” is that even my ability to remove those “kinks” is a gift of God. But I do have to do something—not a good, meritorious work of which I can boast but merely admitting my helplessness and utter dependence on God’s grace and asking God to give me the ability and desire to remove the kinks.

The best exposition of this evangelical synergistic/Arminian soteriology in modern language is *The Transforming Power of Grace* by Thomas Oden. By all accounts an orthodox, biblically serious, and evangelical theologian, Oden winsomely and biblically articulates the theology briefly outlined above that I call evangelical synergism. Of grace Oden says: “God prepares the will and co-works with the prepared will. Insofar as grace precedes and prepares free will it is called prevenient. Insofar as grace accompanies and enables human willing to work with divine willing, it is called cooperating grace.”<sup>49</sup> “Only when sinners are assisted by prevenient grace can they begin to yield their hearts to cooperation with subsequent forms of grace.” “The need for grace to prevene is great, for it was precisely when ‘you were dead in your transgressions and sins’ (Eph. 2:1) that ‘by grace you have been saved’ (Eph. 2:8).”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Olson, R. E. (2011). [\*Against Calvinism\*](#) (pp. 155–174). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Truly it is an evil to be full of faults," said Pascal, "but it is a still greater evil to be full of them, and to be unwilling to recognize them." People divide into two types: not the guilty and the "righteous," as many people think, but rather two different types of guilty people. There are guilty people who acknowledge their wrongs, and guilty ones who do not, two groups who converge in a scene recorded in John 8.

The incident takes place in the temple courts, where Jesus is teaching. A group of Pharisees and teachers of the law interrupt this "church service" by dragging in a woman caught in adultery. Following the custom, she is stripped to the waist as a token of her shame. Terrified, defenseless, publicly humiliated, the woman cowers before Jesus, her arms covering her bare breasts.

Adultery takes two, of course, but the woman stands alone before Jesus. John makes clear that the accusers have less interest in punishing a crime than in setting a trap for Jesus, and quite a clever trap it is. Moses' law specifies death by stoning for adultery, yet Roman law forbids the Jews from carrying out executions. Will Jesus obey Moses or Rome? Or will he, notorious for his mercy, find some way to let this adulteress off the hook? If so, he must defy Moses' law before a crowd assembled in the very courts of the temple. All eyes fix on Jesus.

At that moment crackling with tension, Jesus does something unique: he bends down and writes on the ground with his finger. This is, in fact, the only scene from the Gospels that shows Jesus writing. For his only written words he chose as his medium a palette of sand, knowing that footsteps, wind, or rain would soon erase them.

John does not tell us what Jesus wrote in the sand. In his movie of Jesus' life, Cecil B. DeMille depicts him spelling out the names of various sins: Adultery, Murder, Pride, Greed, Lust. Each time Jesus writes a word, a few more Pharisees file away. DeMille's guess, like all others, is conjecture. We know only that in this moment freighted with danger Jesus pauses, keeps silent, and fingers words on the ground. Irish poet Seamus Heaney comments that Jesus "marks time in every possible sense of that phrase," concentrating everyone's attention and creating a rift of meaning between what is going to happen and whatever the audience wishes to happen.

Those in the audience no doubt see two categories of actors in the drama: the guilty woman, caught red-handed, and the "righteous" accusers who are, after all, religious professionals. When Jesus finally speaks, he demolishes one of those categories. "If any one of you is without sin," he says, "let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

Again, he stoops to write, marking more time, and one by one all the accusers slink away.

Next, Jesus straightens up to address the woman, left alone before him. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, sir," she says.

And to this woman, dragged in terror to her expected execution, Jesus grants absolution: "Then neither do I condemn you.... Go now and leave your life of sin."

Thus, in a brilliant stroke Jesus replaces the two assumed categories, righteous and guilty, with two different categories: sinners who admit and sinners who deny. The woman caught in adultery helplessly admitted her guilt. Far more problematic were people like the Pharisees who denied or repressed guilt. They too needed hands empty for grace.

Dr. Paul Tournier expresses this pattern in the language of psychiatry: "God blots out conscious guilt, but He brings to consciousness repressed guilt."

That stance of openness to receive is what I call the “catch” to grace. It must be received, and the Christian term for that act is *repentance*, the doorway to grace. C. S. Lewis said repentance is not something God arbitrarily demands of us; “It is simply a description of what going back is like.” In terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son, repentance is the flight home that leads to joyful celebration. It opens the way to a future, to a relationship restored.

The Bible’s many fierce passages on sin appear in a new light once I understand God’s desire to press me toward repentance, **the doorway to grace**. Jesus told Nicodemus, “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” In other words, he awakes guilt for my own benefit. God seeks not to crush me but to liberate me, and liberation requires a **defenseless spirit** like that of the woman caught red-handed, not the haughty spirit of the Pharisees.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Yancey, P. (2009). [\*Where is god when it hurts/what’s so amazing about grace?\*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

## Receiving God's Grace In Vain

*W. C. Hinton, Jr.*

IN THE POWERFUL FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF 1 Corinthians Paul refers to certain basics of the gospel, to his preaching to those brethren, and to the appearances of the Lord. Then he gives an exclamatory statement of his own condition: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain" (verse 10). God has favored mankind exceedingly by making it possible for him, as well as Paul, to learn to love and obey the truth that makes men free. How grateful we ought to be!

God's grace meets our greatest need—salvation. "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men" (Titus 2:11). Urgings, facts and beauties of this salvation are communicated through the Word "which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). Demands are made of the committed so that they are neither dull nor bored. A life of labor must follow one into the realm of salvation (see 1 Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 2:20–21; Titus 2:11–12; Ephesians 2:10). What God does, He does extremely well; so that His grace is sufficient—more than adequate to meet our needs as seen from Romans 5.

But our attention needs to focus on Ephesians 2:8–10. In speaking of salvation, Paul says "for by grace have ye been saved through faith." We must appreciate the stress made on the fact of the two sides of salvation. **Salvation in God's way clearly takes two.** A clear-cut example is seen in Jesus' lament over the city of Jerusalem: "I would have gathered ... but ye would not" (Matthew 23:37). Or again, in the familiar story of Naaman, the cleansing (grace, if you please) was effected only after the one in need had complied with the specified conditions. Grace—the divine side—shows us God's love. He planned/purposed and developed the means to redemption and spiritual blessings found in His Son. But Paul also said "through faith"—and here we see the human element. Rewarded faith is always live, active, working and obedient. It is by the means of this faith that we gain for ourselves the divine blessings. By the grace of God adequate provisions have been made, but men are not saved by mere provisions. God provides food and water for man but if he will not, for whatever reason, eat or drink—he will die. In Acts 2, Peter declared the provisions made by God and then urged them to "save yourselves." Peter also observed, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34–35).

It is hard for people to admit that they are, or might be, lost. *Lost* is a dreadful word that stirs up chilling thoughts. Lost in the midst of a blinding blizzard, off the charted path in the churning, raging seas, or the lone pilot with dead instruments in the center of a storm cloud frantically searching for the airport are mild and can in no way be compared to one being lost eternally. But what does it mean to be lost? It means all the forethought, energy and yearning of the heavenly Father and His Son is thwarted by one refusing to accept God's loving offer in His Son to renew a relationship, to pick up the pieces of life and self and become a child of the King—worthy of life eternal. On the other hand, we see that punishment of the lost is demanded by the righteousness of God—justice must be served.

Two powerful forces act upon the stubborn will of man—love and goodness. “For the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). “The goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Romans 2:4). Both of these forces are seen in the scene of the cross and thus make its drawing power tremendous (John 12:32). Yet, some hearts are too tough to be touched by the tenderness of love and need to be shocked. To so move people was Jonah’s task in Nineveh; “in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown” brought them all, king to peasant, to repentance. The punishment of the impenitent makes us know that “God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

And it means that the sinner is ruined. You know, life is not easy. There are bitter trials, financial reverses, sicknesses, accidents, disloyalty of trusted friends, unrequited love and other trying experiences. Still, these cannot be compared with the horrors of hell. Standing there on the brink of eternity, lost, one might well reflect on Jesus’ penetrating question: “What will a man give in exchange for his soul?” The rich man of Luke 16 cried out in pain, being in torment. It does not cease—“they have no rest day and night” (Revelation 14:11). And, although millions will be in hell, there will be the utter and complete loneliness, each engrossed in his own suffering with no thought or time for others. The final decree will echo in one’s ears, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41). Then think of the regret and remorse. Abraham told the rich man of Luke 16, “Son, remember.” Memories will drive us up the walls! Wasted years! Unaccepted opportunities! And worst of all, perhaps, is the hopeless despair of no relief or end in sight. Hell is eternal!

It is a frightful thing to think that God has made such abundant provision of His grace, and yet we can void it all. Paul said, “We ... beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain” (2 Corinthians 6:1). Being lost is such a tragedy, such a waste, so unnecessary—for Christ died to prevent it from coming to pass in our lives. What are *you* doing about it? Are you maybe not far from the kingdom? Hasten to activate your faith, commit your life, strike out for the high ground of mountain-top living. Or have you once been in the kingdom, enjoyed the blessings, experienced God’s generous grace—and for thoughtless reasons of little value turned your back on God? If so, it was the poorest decision you ever made. Retrace your steps and reclaim the crown so that you will not disappoint yourself or God. Dedicate your life to helping others, “snatching them from the fire”—and give thanks to God that you had the disposition and determination to come to your senses and set in order the proper priorities. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift—the Son of His love!

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<sup>34</sup> Hinton, W. C., Jr. (1984). [Receiving God’s Grace In Vain](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 22.

# Calvinism (IV) Irresistible Grace

By Harry E. Ozment

## Definition

It is true that certain physical blessings of the grace of God are given to the believer and unbeliever alike. Jesus said, “For he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.” (Matt. 5:45) Paul explained in I Tim. 4: 10 that God “is the Savior of all men,” i.e., God sustains all life upon this earth through the bestowal of certain physical blessings (e.g., sunshine, rain, air, etc.). No one denies this. Notice, however, what Paul next says, “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those who believe.” Paul, in the last clause of v. 10, is speaking of the spiritual blessings of God which contribute to the eternal salvation of man this grace is given to believers.

Calvinism denies that any “special, grace is shown to believers as opposed to unbelievers. The doctrine of “irresistible grace” is a branch off the vine of “predestination.” God’s grace to salvation, according to Calvinism, is given only to the elect-whether the elect desire it or not. The Presbyterian Confession of Faith states: “This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.” (Chapter 10) This doctrine, as you can see, provides for a direct and mysterious indwelling of the Spirit. This doctrine, together with its foundation doctrine (predestination), teaches that an “elected” person is saved at the very beginning in the mind of God, and he is saved “in fact” when God arbitrarily sends His Spirit into the heart of that individual.



## Errors of the Doctrine

Because the existence of this doctrine depends to a great extent on the existence of “predestination,” errors of the two doctrines could be interchanged. However, as we specifically consider the Calvinistic concept of “irresistible grace,” many errors are glaringly evident, for this doctrine:

(1) Negates the importance of man’s obedience. This doctrine would have people believe that the grace of God to salvation is given to the obedient and disobedient alike provided they have been elected. According to Calvinism, God, in His own time, arbitrarily sends the Spirit upon whomsoever He will, while totally disregarding (a) the kind of lives these people live, and (b) the desire (or lack of it) that these people have for His grace. Such a doctrine can only do one thing: consign obedience to the realm of the “non-essential.” And when Calvinism does this, it is in complete contradiction with the Bible. The Bible teaches that man’s obedience is essential to his salvation. Jesus stated: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21)

When the Bible teaches the essentiality of obedience, it does not imply that man’s obedience earns salvation. On the contrary, our active obedience to God’s will indicates that we cannot save ourselves, and thus makes us openly admit that we must submit to Him to be saved. Of course, this would not be the case if we were to try to be saved by obeying our will. We read in Acts 10:34-35: “Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” Paul states the case well by contrasting the works of God with the works of man in Eph. 2:8-10 (notice the intensive words emphasis mine, HEO):

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Neither does the Bible imply that man’s obedience displaces God’s grace. The Bible teaches that God’s grace, coupled with man’s obedience, produces the promised blessing. This Bible principle is illustrated several times in Heb. 11: “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet (grace), moved with fear, prepared an ark (obedience) to the saving of his house (promised blessing)” (v. 7); “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place (grace), which he should after receive for an inheritance (promised blessing), obeyed (obedience)” (v. 8); “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed (grace), and was delivered of a child when she was past age (promised blessing), because she judged him faithful who had promised (obedience).” (v. 11) This same principle is true today, as is shown by the statement found in Heb. 5:9: “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” “Eternal salvation” is the promised blessing. Through the grace of God, Jesus shed his blood (“became the author”), which purchased the church and put into effect God’s will. Man’s obedience, though, must be coupled to God’s grace, as is shown in the last clause: “unto all them that obey him.” Hence, if obedience is essential to salvation, “irresistible grace” cannot be possible.

(2) Denies the true nature of grace. Paul explains the nature of grace in Eph. 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” Grace is a gift. A gift necessarily involves two ideas: (a) the will of the giver to give; and (b) the consent of

the receiver to receive. If either of these conditions is missing, the item given is not a gift.

The word “irresistible” means “impossible to successfully resist” (Webster). Therefore, to state that God’s grace is “irresistible” is to say that the “consent of the receiver” is not necessarily involved in the giving of grace. Hence, this would deny that the grace of God is a gift. Such is the sad consequence of believing Calvinistic theory!

(3) Destroys the free agency of man. One of the great truths of the Bible is that man is a free moral agent. He has enough intelligence to determine his course of action. God said in Deut. 30:15-18: “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; in ..that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish.” This was true of Adam and Eve in the very beginning. They were given intelligent minds which were capable of making decisions. Two ways were set before them-the way of right and the way of wrong. God coaxed them to go the way of right and warned them against going the way of wrong-but the final decision was made by Adam and Eve. Therefore, when man decided to go the way of wrong, he was held accountable for it. The same is true today. Jesus said, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, he shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.” (Jn. 15:6-7) The vine is provided by the grace of God. But we, as branches, exercise free determination in choosing whether to abide in this vine’. Calvinism denies this.

This theory would have us to believe that the elect must receive the grace of God-they have no choice about the matter. God's grace is irresistible! God certainly could not hold unsaved individuals accountable if their condition was in no way due to their own free choice. Such a theory! - it denies the most, evident truths of the Bible!

It is sad but true that the grace of God can be resisted -many millions resist His grace every day. God's power to save our souls is His word (Rom. 1: 16; Jas. 1:21). When men spurn this word for their divisive human creeds, they are most surely resisting the grace of the Almighty!

Truth Magazine, XVIII:32, p. 9-10  
June 13, 1974

## COUNTERING THE COUNTERFACTUAL TEST

### ❖ Bible Says You Are In Charge Of Your Own Heart

❖ *Jeremiah 4: 4 – “Remove the foreskin of your hearts”*

❖ *Jeremiah 9: 13 – “Stubbornly followed their hearts”*

❖ *Jeremiah 18: 11 – “Act according to his evil heart”*

❖ *Ezekiel 18:31 – “Make Yourselves  
A New Heart & A New Spirit!”*

## Conditional Salvation

Charles L. Morton

“FOR THE GRACE OF GOD THAT BRINGETH salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11–12). Man’s need of divine grace is affirmed in the foregoing passage, for it is by the grace of God that salvation is brought to a lost and dying world. Salvation is restricted, however, to those who *receive* God’s grace—and all other accountable people are yet lost in sin. Divine grace is universally available, for the text affirms that the “grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to *all men*.”

It must also be emphasized that our text, Titus 2:11–12, affirms with equal force that salvation by divine grace is conditional, for the grace of God *teaches* that we should deny ungodly lusts and live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Uninspired men cannot improve upon the text for plainness of speech and clarity of language. To be saved by grace, saint and sinner alike must respond to God’s teaching by renouncing the allurements of this world and living in a positive, forthright manner as children of God by their obedience to the gospel of Christ. Jesus said, “Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

That salvation by grace is *conditional* is a major New Testament doctrine. Along with the text cited above, we invite attention to some additional passages:

1. **In Titus 3:5, Paul declared**, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The “works of righteousness” of this passage are *not* the conditions of obedience to the gospel, but are the works of human merit—the “works of righteousness which we have done.” These are the type of works of which Paul wrote in his condemnation of the Jews: “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3). When Paul declared in Titus 3:5 that “according to his mercy he saved us,” it is evident that this salvation is conditional, for in the same passage while on the same subject, the apostle wrote: “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Titus 3:8). Indeed, salvation by grace is conditional.

**2. In Ephesians 2:8–9, Paul wrote,** “For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.” This passage affirms (1) that there is the divine side to salvation: “By *grace* are ye saved;” and (2) there is a human side to salvation: “By grace are ye saved *through faith*.” Now this passage does *not* teach salvation by grace *unconditionally*, nor does it teach salvation by faith *only*, for it must be understood in the light of all New Testament teaching. The Bible says, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:26). Indeed, salvation by grace through faith requires obedience.

Consider the case of the Ephesians themselves. The New Testament declares that the Ephesians had heard and believed the gospel (Ephesians 1:13). These same Ephesians had repented of their sins and confessed their faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:17–20). They had also been baptized into Christ (Acts 19:1–5). These were the ones of whom Paul wrote, “For by grace are ye saved through faith: and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8–9).

**3. A clear illustration of the fact that salvation by grace is conditional is the case of Cornelius.** Now Cornelius was a Gentile, and the Bible teaches that Jew and Gentile alike are saved by grace (Ephesians 2:11–18). When the apostle Peter preached the gospel to this Gentile, his inspired sermon was introduced with the statement: “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, *and worketh righteousness*, is accepted with him (Acts 10:34–35).

On the day of Pentecost, the Bible says of the apostle Peter, “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). All today are likewise exhorted to respond obediently to the grace of God.

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<sup>35</sup> Morton, C. L. (1984). [Conditional Salvation](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 17.

# GRACE ABUSE: DEVALUATION

## The Honor-Shame Societal Setting of Reciprocity Obligations:

### Patronage and Friendship

“Numerous examples of **brokerage** can be found in the letters of Cicero, Pliny the Younger and Fronto, correspondence providing windows into public policy from the late republic through the second century of the empire. Pliny’s letters to the emperor Trajan (dating from A.D. 111–113, the time during which Pliny was governor of Bithynia) contain attempts by Pliny to procure imperial favors for his own friends and clients. In one such letter (*Ep.* 10.4), Pliny introduces a client of his, named Voconius Romanus, to Trajan with a view to getting Voconius a senatorial appointment. He addresses Trajan clearly as a client addressing his patron and proceeds to ask a favor for Voconius. Pliny offers his own character as a guarantee of his client’s character, and Trajan’s “favorable judgement” of Pliny (not Voconius, whom he does not know) would become the basis for Trajan’s granting of this favor. Should the favor be granted by the emperor, Voconius would be indebted not only to Trajan but also to Pliny, who will, in turn, be indebted further to Trajan.<sup>6</sup> The broker, or mediator, at the same time incurs a debt and increases his own honor through the indebtedness of his client. Brokerage—the gift of access to another, often greater patron—was in itself a highly valued benefit. Without such connections the client would never have had access to what he desired or needed. This is especially apparent in the case of Pliny’s physical therapist, Arpocras, who gains both Roman and Alexandrian citizenship by means of Pliny, who petitions Trajan on his behalf (*Ep.* 10.5–7, 10). Pliny gives this local physician access to the emperor, the fount of patronage, which he would never have enjoyed otherwise. Brokerage could even intervene in the judicial process. Both Cicero<sup>7</sup> and Marcus Aurelius (*Ad M. Caes.* 3.2) use their connections of friendship with a judge to secure favorable outcomes for their clients, on whose behalf they write.

### The Social Context of Grace

We have looked closely and at some length at the relationships and activities that mark the patron-client relationship, friendship and public benefaction, because these are the social contexts in which the word *grace* (*charis*) is at home in the first century A.D. Today, *grace* is primarily a religious word, heard only in churches and Christian circles. It has progressed through millennia of theological reflection, developments and accretions (witness the multiplication of terms like “justifying grace,” “sanctifying grace” and “prevenient grace” in Christian theology, systematizing the order of salvation). For the actual writers and readers of the New Testament, however, *grace* was not primarily a religious, as opposed to a secular, word. Rather, it was used to speak of reciprocity among human beings and between mortals and God (or, in pagan literature, the gods). This single word encapsulated the entire ethos of the relationships we have been describing.

First, *grace* was used to refer to the willingness of a patron to grant some benefit to another person or to a group. In this sense, it means “favor,” in the sense of “favorable disposition.” In Aristotle’s words (*Rhetoric* 2.7.1 [1385a16–20]), “Grace [*charis*] may be defined as helpfulness toward someone in need, not in return for anything, nor for the advantage of the helper himself [or herself], but for that of the person helped.” In this sense, the word highlights the generosity and disposition of the patron, benefactor or giver. The same word carries a second sense, often being used to denote the gift itself, that is, the result of the giver’s beneficent feelings. Many honorary inscriptions mention the graces (*charitas*) of the benefactor as the cause for conferring public praise, emphasizing the real and received products of the benefactor’s goodwill toward a city or group.

Finally, *grace* can be used to speak of the response to a benefactor and his or her gifts, namely, “gratitude.” Demosthenes provides a helpful window into this aspect in his *De Corona* as he chides his audience for not responding honorably to those who have helped them in the past: “But you are so ungrateful (*acharistos*) and wicked by nature that, having been made free out of slavery and wealthy out of poverty by these people, you do not show gratitude (*charin echeis*) toward them but rather enriched yourself by taking action against them” (*De Corona* 131). *Grace* thus has very specific meanings for the authors and readers of the New Testament, meanings derived primarily from the use of the word in the context of the giving of benefits and the requiting of favors. The fact that one and the same word can be used to speak of a beneficent act and the response to a beneficent act suggests implicitly what many moralists from the Greek and Roman cultures stated explicitly: grace must be met with grace; favor must always give birth to favor; gift must always be met with gratitude.

## Responding with Grace

As we have already seen in Seneca’s allegory of the three Graces, an act of favor must give rise to a response of gratitude—*grace must answer grace*, or else something beautiful will be defaced and turned into something ugly. According to Cicero, while initiating a gift was a matter of choice, gratitude was not optional for honorable people, but rather an absolute duty (*De Offic.* 1.47–48). Receiving a favor or kindness meant incurring very directly a debt or obligation to respond gratefully, a debt on which one could not default.<sup>36</sup> Seneca stresses the simultaneity of receiving a gift and an obligation: “The person who intends to be grateful, even while she or he is receiving, should turn his or her thoughts to returning the favor” (*Ben.* 2.25.3). Indeed, the virtuous person could seek to compete with the giver in terms of kindnesses and favor, trying not merely to return the favor but to return it with interest like the fruitful soil that bears crops far more abundant than the seeds that were scattered on it.<sup>37</sup>

Ingratitude is something to be avoided in itself because there is nothing that so effectually disrupts and destroys the harmony of the human race as this vice. For how else do we live in security if it is not that we help each other by an exchange of good offices? It is only through the interchange of benefits that life becomes in some measure equipped and fortified against sudden disasters. Take us singly, and what are we? The prey of all creatures. (*Ben.* 4.18.1, LCL)

Responding justly to one’s benefactors was a behavior enforced not by written laws but rather “by unwritten customs and universal practice,” with the result that a person known for gratitude would be considered praiseworthy and honorable by all, while the ingrate would be regarded as disgraceful. There was no law for the prosecution of the person who failed to requite a favor (with the interesting exception of classical Macedonia), but, Seneca affirmed, the punishment of shame and being hated by all good people would more than make up for the lack of official sanctions.<sup>42</sup> **Neglecting to return a kindness, forgetfulness of kindnesses already received in the past, and, most horrendous of all, repaying favor with insult or injury—these were courses of action to be avoided by an honorable person at all costs. Rather, gifts were always to be remembered, commemorated first of all in the shrine of one’s own mind, and always to be requited with gratitude. The social sanctions of honor and shame, therefore, were important bulwarks for the virtue of gratitude and exerted considerable pressure in this direction.** As we consider gratitude, then, we are presented with something of a paradox. Just as the favor was freely bestowed, so the response must be free and uncoerced. Nonetheless, that response is at the same time necessary and unavoidable for an honorable person who wishes to be known as such (and hence the recipient of favor in the future). Gratitude is never a formal obligation. There is no advance calculation of or agreed on return for the gift given. Nevertheless, the recipient of a favor knows that he or she stands under the necessity of returning favor when favor has been received. The element of exchange must settle into the background, being dominated instead by a sense of mutual favor, of mutual goodwill and generosity.<sup>48</sup>



## Manifestations of Gratitude

**“Returning a favor”** could take on many forms, depending on the nature of the gift and the relative economic and political clout of the parties concerned. Cities or associations would show their gratitude for public benefactions by providing for the public recognition (honoring and increasing the fame) of the giver and often memorializing the gift and the honors conferred by means of a public inscription or, in exceptional cases, a statue of the giver or other monument.

A second component of gratitude that comes to expression in relationships of personal patronage or friendship is **loyalty to the giver**, that is, showing gratitude and owning one’s association with the giver even when fortunes turn, and it becomes costly. Thus Seneca writes about gratitude that “if you wish to make a return for a favor, you must be willing to go into exile, or to pour forth your blood, or to undergo poverty, or,...even to let your very innocence be stained and exposed to shameful slanders” (*Ep. Mor.* 81.27). Wallace-Hadrill writes that despite the fact that, in theory, clients were expected to remain loyal to their patrons, in practice, if a patron fell into political trouble or if his or her fortunes began to wane, the patron’s entourage of clients would evaporate.<sup>51</sup> Such practice, however, was contrary to *the ideal of gratitude, according to which a person would stand by (or under) the person’s patron and continue to live gratefully even if it cost the individual the future favors of others, or brought him or her into dangerous places and worked contrary to self-interest. The person who disowned or dissociated himself or herself from a patron because of self-interest was an ingrate.*

**The principal of loyalty meant that clients or friends would have to take care not to become entangled in webs of crossed loyalties. Although a person could have multiple patrons, to have as patrons two people who were enemies or rivals of one another would place one in a dangerous position, since ultimately the client would have to prove loyal and grateful to one but disloyal and ungrateful to the other. “No one can serve two masters” honorably in the context of these masters being at odds with one another, but if the masters are “friends” or bound to each other by some other means, the client should be safe in receiving favors from both.**

## The Dance of Grace

Such mutually contradictory rules (forgetting and remembering, being silent and bearing witness, and the like) are constructed so as to keep the giver’s mind wholly on what is noble about patronage (generosity, acting in the interest of others) and the recipient’s mind wholly on what is noble for the client (namely making a full and rich return of gratitude for favors conferred). They are devised in order to sustain both parties’ commitment to acting nobly within the system of reciprocity. The ultimate goal for these ancient ethicists, after all, was not perfect systematization but virtuous conduct. Grace, then, held two parties together in a bond of reciprocal exchanges, a bond in which each party committed to provide what he or she (or they) could to serve the needs or desires of the other. Though often profitably compared to a dance that had to be kept “grace-full” in a circle of giving and receiving, these relationships were far more than ornamental or recreational (as dances are). They formed the bedrock of society, a person’s principal assurance of aid and support in an uncertain and insecure world.”<sup>36</sup> (Source)

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<sup>36</sup> deSilva, D. A. (2000). [\*Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: unlocking New Testament culture\*](#) (pp. 94–119). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

## Dietrich Bonhoeffer



“Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjacks' wares. The sacraments, the forgiveness of sin, and the consolations of religion are thrown away at cut prices. Grace is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. Since the cost was infinite, the possibilities of using and spending it are infinite. What would grace be if it were not cheap?...

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble; it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. **Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God."**

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship

## Cheap grace – What is it?

The phrase "cheap grace" is often associated with German theologian and minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *The Cost of Discipleship*. In his book, published in 1937, he said that cheap grace was "the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."

As defined by Bonhoeffer, cheap grace is an approach to Christianity that only emphasizes the good or easy parts without telling the truth regarding the difficult aspects of it. To leave out the more difficult aspects of repentance, church discipline, confession, discipleship, the cross, or the full story of Christ's life offers an incomplete, "cheap" view of God's grace.

In contrast, grace is not cheap but is a priceless gift. God sent His one and only Son to die as a sacrifice for our sins. Jesus endured the pain and the shame of the cross to offer us salvation by grace through faith in Him ([Philippians 2:5-8](#); [Hebrews 12:1-2](#); [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)).

Further, though salvation is a free gift of grace, the Christian life includes times and aspects of costly sacrifice. Paul, James, Jude, and Peter referred to themselves in their letters as a "servant" or "slave" of Christ Jesus. Jesus even referred to those who lived for Him as people who would take up their cross daily and follow Him ([Luke 9:23](#)).

Much debate often arises between those who emphasize salvation by grace as a free gift and those who emphasize the actions of a changed life that should result from a person who has been changed by Christ. For example, in the past century a debate arose between two views representing these ideas known as Free Grace and Lordship Salvation.

The Free Grace position emphasizes all that is necessary for salvation is to receive Jesus as Savior ([John 1:12](#); [John 3:16](#); [Romans 10:9](#)). The Lordship Salvation view argues that a person must receive Jesus as Savior and Lord to truly be saved and that genuine life change must be exhibited as a result ([Luke 14:25-33](#); [Romans 5:20-21](#); [Ephesians 4:17-24](#); [James 2:14-26](#)).

A driving motivation in this debate has been the growth of what some have called "carnal Christians." These are people who consider themselves Christians yet show little or no difference in their lives than non-Christians. A Free Grace position would argue that many of these people are true believers who are living in sin while a Lordship Salvation view would argue these carnal Christians have never been saved at all.

In summary, the idea of "cheap grace" is one that was developed by Bonhoeffer and has had great influence within Christian thought over the past century. While the grace of God is a free gift available to all who will receive it, a disciple of Jesus Christ will also be willing to grow and endure hardship for the sake of the Gospel. Salvation is about transformation ([2 Cor. 5:17](#)) and new life in Christ ([John 10:10](#)). Our freedom came at great cost to Jesus ([1 Cor. 6:20](#); [7:23](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#)). Grace is free, but it is not cheap.

*GOD'S  
GRACE IS  
FREE BUT  
IT IS NOT  
CHEAP!*

# Editorial: Grace: costly, free, but not cheap

**John M. Fowler**

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Grace is God's unmerited favor to sinners. With that as a working definition, I once tried to give a Bible study to a Hindu friend on the Christian doctrine of salvation by grace. But I didn't get too far. My friend had too many questions about this business called unmerited favor. He extended that kind of favor every day to a number of people: the beggar on the street did not deserve the favor of his generosity; the accountant who swindled a large sum of money from his business received an unmerited forgiveness that kept him from jail; his mother-in-law, grouchy and complaining all week, got a new sari for no particular reason. My friend's argument was simple: the beggar, the crook, and his mother-in-law did not deserve any favor from him, but he did show them unmerited favors. Was he practicing grace?

When we speak of divine grace, we are not talking of human goodness, and we are not talking of humanistic noble-mindedness. We are referring to God's basis of redemption of us sinners. As sinners we deserve death; God offers us life. We are separated; He offers us reconciliation. We are under judgment; He provides us freedom. We are prodigals in swineland; He brings us home. All for free. And the basis of God's redemptive initiative and operation is grace. When Paul says "The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men" (Titus 2:11),\* he is not referring to any ethereal or abstract quality of God, but to the dynamic, concrete, historic event of Jesus Christ more specifically, the act of Christ on the cross. God chose to deal with the problem of sin through the cross, and because of that **sovereign choice**, forgiveness and freedom from sin are possible only through the cross. Thus, grace is God's sovereign initiative and activity for the salvation of sinners who through (obedient) faith accept that provision of divine grace.

Paul devotes the entire Epistle of Romans to the singular theme that salvation is by God's grace, and not by human works. The apostle lays down the summary principle: "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace" (Rom 11:6). To the apostle, so far as salvation is concerned, grace and works are mutually exclusive principles.

## Free, but costly

But to speak of grace as free does not mean that it is not costly. It is free only so far as the recipient is concerned. To the Provider, the price was enormous. The cost is inestimable. God's choice of dealing with sin through the manifestation of His grace cost the life of His Son. Who can estimate the value of that act of divine love? Gethsemane and the cross, the dreadful wrath of God against sin witnessed there, show not only divine abhorrence of sin but also the divine cost to effect the plan of salvation. When Paul speaks of "God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself (2 Cor. 5:18), He is putting the Father and the Son together in the act of salvation, and shows that Both paid a great price for making divine-human reconciliation possible. Ephesians 1:7, 8 spells out clearly the price paid: "In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us." God and His grace, Christ and His blood, and our sins and our forgiveness are all brought together in this one beautiful passage to show that we have nothing to do or to add to what has already been done by God. Ours is only to respond in faith and let the blood of Jesus free us from our sins (Rev. 1:5).

## Free, but not cheap

Grace is free. Grace is costly. But grace is not cheap. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who ministered against formidable odds and bore witness to his faith at considerable cost, coined the term *cheap grace*. Coined during the tumultuous days of the Nazi era, in the face of a passive church that spoke of redemption but knew little of its meaning and its impact on daily life, cheap grace denotes not only corporate indifference to the demands of discipleship but also personal blindness and deafness to the call of Jesus to follow Him. **"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."** <sup>1</sup>

Cheap grace has nothing to do with the call of Jesus. When Jesus calls a person, He offers him a cross to carry. To be a disciple is to be a follower, and being a follower of Jesus is no cheap trick.

To the Corinthians Paul twice wrote of the obligations of grace. First, he speaks of his own experience: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them [the apostles], though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me" (1 Cor. 15:10). See how Paul acknowledges the supremacy of God's grace in his life? And immediately he adds that this grace was not given to him in vain. The Greek *eis kenon* literally translates "for emptiness." **That is to say, the Apostle Paul did not receive grace in order to lead a vain, empty life—but rather a life filled with the fruits of the Spirit, and even that not in his own strength but by the power of the indwelling grace. Similarly he pleads with the believers "not to accept the grace of God in vain" (2 Cor. 6:1).**

The grace of God has not come to redeem us from one kind of emptiness to place us in another kind of emptiness. God's grace is His activity to reconcile us to Himself, to make us a part of the family of God. We come into that family, not because of any good works that we have done, but because we have accepted through (obedient) faith what God has done through the cross of Jesus. Having come into the family, we live in the family, bearing fruits of God's love through the power of His amazing grace.

- ministry journal



You can choose many things in life, but your lineage is not one of them. You can't choose your parents. Or your ancestors. You're stuck with what you get, good or bad or in-between.

### **Except for Jesus.**

Ponder this fact: Jesus was the only person in history who chose His mother, father, grandmothers, and grandfathers all the way to the beginning of time.

So, who did He choose? People who obeyed God and showed great faith? Sinless, perfect people who always did what was right? Hardly. Those people didn't exist, of course. What do you know of your family tree? You may have pictures on a wall or in faded photo albums. These wrinkled faces represent stories shared and passed down. Lore, lies, and truth mixed and matched. You see the eyes, you recognize a little of yourself in their smiles, but most never read between the lines. Most never know the heart of their ancestors.

The Bible contains this kind of record of the lineage of Jesus. Men and women who bare their souls in the struggle to know God and follow Him in challenging times. The fascinating thing about these stories is that they reveal more than the foibles and follies of desperate human beings. They also record the heart of God. The lineage of Jesus is a litmus of the love, mercy, and longsuffering of the Almighty toward His people. Toward you. God wants you to reflect His grace to others.

Grace has a popular acrostic:

Grace = **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense.

God wants you to receive His grace, possess it, and extend it. It's a process that will change you from the inside out. You were created to receive, experience, and extend that kind of love every day to your family and friends.

Even your enemies.

This is not an intellectual concept for the brain or simply an ethereal, spiritual theorem. Grace is not a mystical, impossible-to-apprehend idea. It's a practical, hands-on exercise that will help you live fully, from the heart, rather than from obligation or expectation.

Most followers of Jesus don't live this way. So, we live defeated. We lose at life because we cannot be good enough. We cannot please God and never will because He will always look over heaven's portal with His arms crossed, shaking His head.

The problem lies in the chasm that exists between God's demands and our ability. Only one person has ever been able to bridge the gap.

The message of [the Gospel] is that there is an extraordinarily better way. Here it is: God's love stripped bare. Hanging on a cross. Paying the penalty. Offering forgiveness. Cutting a new path of freedom for you to walk. A path where mercy bids you leave your guilt and shame behind. A path with a hand on your shoulder to guide you.

Let this truth wash over you. God has chosen to give you extraordinary, extravagant, exceptional *grace*. John Newton, the old slave trader, had no reason to claim God's love. He called it "amazing." It crosses the border of the unthinkable. We don't deserve to be treated like this. But here it is. God's grace.

This is a study of God at work among ordinary people. Their failure was not final. Their past did not exclude them from God's love. Their sin did not determine their destiny. And neither does yours. No matter what you've done, where you've been, what bad thing has been done to you, or what bad things you have done, the grace of God and His extravagant love are available.

When God sent the Word made flesh to dwell among us, He gave us the perfect representation of this extraordinary grace. In fact, if you look at the hinge-point of history, you will see the Creator of the universe nailed to two beams of wood, hanging between the incomparable need of every human heart and the undying love of God. This cursed God/man reveals God's extraordinary grace.

*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

Perhaps you've been following Jesus for years, but you feel aimless. Perhaps you know about Jesus, but you have no idea what "abundant life" means. Wherever you are, whatever your background, these stories cry out about the incomparable, unbelievable love of God. Anyone willing to abandon their efforts to please God through their own efforts can receive the righteousness of Jesus. And once you receive this grace, you can begin to live fully from its power, and you will draw from that well of forgiveness and extend that to others.

Dare to take God at His word. Dare to believe. And see what He will do in and through you by His extraordinary grace.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Chapman, G., & Fabry, C. (2013). [\*Extraordinary grace: how the unlikely lineage of jesus reveals god's amazing love\*](#). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

## God's Grace Is Free But Not Cheap

By [Mike Riley](#)

Categories: [Church of Christ Bulletin Articles](#)

In [John 1:14-17](#), John records the following about our Lord:

*"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him, and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me [ranks higher than I], for He was before me.' And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the Law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."*

The word "grace" simply means "unmerited favor" — [favor that one receives which is undeserved and unearned](#). The idea of grace being "free" means that it became available to us without cost to us ([Ephesians 2:8](#)).

However, it does not mean it was without cost at all, for **it cost God plenty** to offer it to us without charge ([John 3:16](#); [Romans 5:8](#); [1 John 4:9](#)). Grace is indeed priceless, but Someone else paid the price because we couldn't afford it.

### Grace is Costly Because it Calls Us To Follow Jesus

We are permitted the privilege of choosing the way of grace and become disciples of Jesus. To be a disciple means to follow after the Teacher. Of course, while we are given this opportunity by grace, we cannot follow through and take advantage of it without cost.

To follow Jesus, means to put His kingdom and righteousness first ([Matthew 6:33](#)). The cost of discipleship means that we must put other things second, third, etc. Another cost associated with discipleship is picking up and bearing a cross of self-denial ([Matthew 16:24](#)). We cannot be His disciple if we refuse to do this.

We cannot be Jesus' disciple if we insist on speaking bitterly against and reviling those who have reviled us. Now that is a heavy cost of discipleship because when someone speaks ill of us wouldn't we love to reply in kind?

But Peter states:

*"For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps ... who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:21-23; cf. Isaiah 53:9).*

We need to understand that it is a privilege without cost to us to be able to become disciples of Christ. We do not deserve the opportunity of being called His people, but when we choose to walk after Him, there will be costs to faithful discipleship. For that reason, He told us to calculate the cost (cf. [Luke 14:25-30](#)).

### **Grace is Costly Because it Costs a Person His Life**

We immediately think of how Jesus gave His life for our sins so that grace could be freely offered by a righteous God to sinners. But to receive grace, we must be willing to give our lives to the Lord as well.

There is more than one way to "give one's life" for a cause. Not only can we give our lives by "dying" for a cause, we can also give our lives by "living" for a cause as well. If one truly follows Christ as His disciple, there will be a life given to Him. Jesus said:

*"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:25-27).*

God's grace means we are saved without regard to our deeds, because His grace is freely offered. However, Jesus says we must give our lives to Him, and this "giving" will effect the deeds we do, and how we are recompensed on that last day.

In [Romans 6:1-8](#), Paul likens one giving his or her life to the Lord as a death of one life and the beginning of a new life. The old person is figuratively crucified (the old way of sin is repented of) so that when one is raised up with Christ from *baptism* he or she might begin to walk "in newness of life" (cf. [Acts 8:36-39](#)).

But let's remember that not only is life given, but **life is also received**. Jesus calls it an "abundant life" ([John 10:10](#)). Everyone who gives, always receives much more ([Gal. 6:9](#); cf. [Proverbs 11:24](#)). This life is a gift in that it is offered to us freely, but we must be "in Christ" to receive it — "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life **in Christ Jesus** our Lord." ([Romans 6:23 ESV](#) — emphasis mine).

### **Grace is Costly Because It Condemns Sin**

Contrary to what some believe, grace does not make sinful acts not sinful. Grace is not a license to sin ([Romans 6:1](#)). We cannot sin under God's grace and be counted as righteous. Some apparently have the idea that God no longer views their sin to be sin because they are under grace. This is incorrect and not taught in Scripture ([Revelation 21:8](#); [Revelation 21:27](#); [Hebrews 10:26-31](#)).

Folks, grace justifies sinners — not their sins! Grace does not make lying, adultery, or greediness any less sinful. What it does freely offer is **conditional forgiveness**. All have sinned ([Romans 3:23](#)) and the wages of sin is death ([Romans 6:23](#)). While grace brings the potential for forgiveness to those under this sentence of death, **we must continue** in the grace of God ([Acts 13:43](#); cf. [Acts 14:22](#)), "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" ([Titus 2:11-13](#)).

## Grace is Costly Because It Cost God The Life of His Son

Yes, grace is not cheap. In fact, we are told that the church was purchased with the blood of God's Son ([Acts 20:28](#)). And as a purchased [peculiar KJV] people ([1 Peter 2:9 ASV](#); cf. [Deuteronomy 14:2](#); [1 Chronicle 17:22](#); [Titus 2:14](#)), we are reminded to glorify God in our bodies because we **"have been bought with a price."** ([1 Corinthians 6:20 ESV](#)).

As recipients of God's grace, we do not deserve this most kind and merciful act.

*"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8).*

Who could ever claim "Jesus died for me because I am worth it." No, we are not worthy of His grace. That is why it is grace. However, we can walk in a manner worthy of our calling ([Ephesians 4:1](#)) and conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ ([Philippians 1:27](#)) and even partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner ([1 Corinthians 11:27-29](#)) but we cannot be worthy of His sacrifice.

### Conclusion:

Grace is indeed free, **but it is not unconditional**. If it were, then everyone would be saved. But it is **conditioned upon our response to it**. In the Bible, our response to God's grace is called "faith" ([Romans 10:17](#)). This is why we are said to be "saved by grace through faith" ([Ephesians 2:8](#)).

Let us praise God each day for the gift of His wonderful grace, and let us properly respond to it by being **obedient to His will** ([Matthew 7:21](#); cf. [Luke 6:46](#); [James 1:22](#)).

# GRACE ABUSE: GRACE FOR SALE



## SONG LYRICS OF "GRACE FOR SALE"

We've got grace for sale

How the worm is turning turning

Lay you down to sleep

With wicked little stories

Count your missing sheep

Shed my skin, my fleece, my sin, my worms

They burrow up the line

Serpents in the branches, branching

Up those crooked vines

Vultures of a feather hatching

Circus lullabies

Carousels are ramping up to heaven

I raise my hell, my cane, my stakes, my snakes

Tongues, tongues

Slither in the mud

That's how a carnival grows, my son

We've got grace for cheap



We've got grace for cheap

Lest you end up bested, lost and torn to shreds, dissected

Tongues, tongues

Slither in the mud

Slither in the mud

That's how a carnival grows, my son

That's how a carnival grows

Fa la la, it's off to hell we go

Cross your heart and hope to die

It's off to hell we go

Fa la la, it's off to hell we go

Stick a needle in your eye

It's off to hell we go

Fa la la, it's off to hell we go

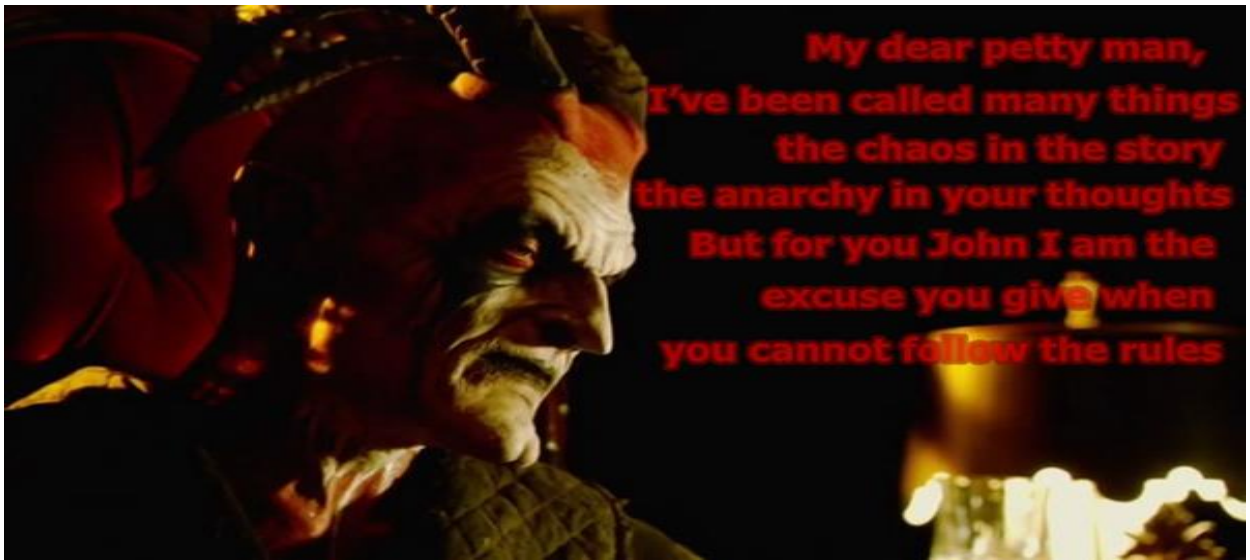
Cross your heart and hope to die

It's off to hell we go

Fa la la, it's off to hell we go

Stick a needle in your eye

It's off to hell we go





## \*6 CALLED TO PREACH?\*

“The meaning of Paul’s term ‘calling’ and its cognates in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7: 17 -24 suggests that it does [refer to social status]. These were tied up with social status in the Graeco-Roman world and were clearly related to class. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in his Greek work on *Roman Antiquities*, offers a discussion of the origins of the Latin word *classis*. ‘There were six divisions which the Romans called classes, by a slight change of the Greek word for the verb which we Greeks pronounce in the imperative mood, the Romans called *cala*, and the classes they anciently called *caleses*.’ When Dionysius describes the Roman class system, he likewise uses the term and its cognates, ‘Those who were eminent for their birth, approved for their virtue and wealth, were distinguished from the class of the obscure, the lowly and the poor.’ Others might call clients ‘hirelings’ as in the case of the Athenians, or ‘serfs’ in the case of the Thessalonians, with the choice of term epitomized by their status. The Latin terms signals in the first-century ‘class’.” – Seek the Welfare of the City, Bruce Winter

J.J. Pollitt states: “A *classis* was a ‘summoning’ or ‘calling out’ of the Roman people for military action. When the Romans assembled in this way, they arranged themselves in groups (*classes*) which were distinguished according to the financial resources and pride of lineage of their members. The adjective *classicus* thus came to mean ‘of or pertaining to class’ in a general way, but most often it referred to things associated with the upper classes. From this it acquired the general sense of ‘first class’ or ‘of the highest rank.’”

# Called And Sent Of God?

By Larry Ray Hafey

Our Lord calls men to obey and serve Him (1 Thess. 2:12; Acts 2:39). His calling card is the word “Whereunto he called you by our gospel” (2 Thess. 2:14). When one receives the divine summons, he ought to believe it (Eph. 1:13). “Access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:18), or “access by faith into this grace” (Rom. 5:2), is “by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). “By one Spirit” is equal to “by the gospel” in the texts above. One enters, that is, has “access by faith into this grace.”

## **“THE CALL TO PREACH”**

That the apostles were called and commissioned to preach no Bible believer doubts or denies (Jn. 17:18; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 10:15). However, denominational clergymen, “Pastors,” become such, they say, when they “receive the call to preach.” But does God call these men?

Does the God and the Christ who sent His Spirit to tell believers to repent and be baptized “for the remission of sins” send a Baptist preacher to tell them they are saved “at the point of faith, before and without water baptism?” Does the Lord, who sent Philip and the eunuch “down both into the water,” send a Methodist bishop to a chalice or tea cup to do the same job? If He does, why does He send a Baptist and tell him not to sprinkle for baptism? The Baptist says God called him, too, but that God told him it was wrong to sprinkle.

Did Jesus authorize Paul to tell certain brethren in Galatia, “Ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4), and send Baptist preachers to tell people today that such a thing is impossible? If He does, why does the same Lord send Methodists and Pentecostals to preach that one may fall from grace? Then does the Lord “call” the Pentecostal to preach that speaking in tongues is the “initial evidence of Holy Ghost baptism” which is for all believers today? With as much proof for his calling as any other denominational preacher, the Pentecostal assures us that it is true. But did the same Lord send Paul to contradict the Pentecostal’s claim (1 Cor. 13:8-13)? He sent Paul; did He send the Pentecostal? If so, did He also send the Missionary Baptist preacher to refute and rebuke what He sent the Pentecostal to preach?

Who is the author of all this confusion and delusion? It is not the God of The Bible. The apostles did not contradict and contravene one another in such a fashion as denominational preachers do (1 Cor. 15:11). The examples and questions set forth above cannot be laughed and shrugged off as the rantings of a wild-eyed, narrowminded, legalist Campbellite. They demand an answer. They cannot be answered with your best grin. Those who are desirous of receiving denominational “Pastors” as called and sent of God need to be first in the line of response.

## **WHAT THE BIBLE MAKES**

The word of God, the New Testament, the gospel never made a man a Lutheran, a Baptist, a Methodist, a Presbyterian, a Mormon, or a Pentecostal. Lutherans claim that they love the Bible, but it has not made them Baptists. Baptists stake as much claim on the Bible and they will tell you that it has not made them Lutherans. Methodists have the same love for the same Bible, but it has not made them Baptists. Presbyterians believe the same Bible as the Methodists who claim it made them Methodists, but it has not made the Presbyterians into Methodists.

If you show me a canary and tell me you got it by breeding elephants and that by breeding canaries you produced hyenas, then you will have a parallel to the breeding of the word of God and denominationalism.

Preachers called and sent of God produced disciples, brethren, Christians. These people constituted the church; they were translated into the kingdom. They were both of and in one faith. Why should we compromise and improvise and tell men that is any different today?

Guardian of Truth XXVII: 6, p. 204  
April 7, 1983



# Are Preachers To Be Called “Reverend”?

By **Wayne Jackson**

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**“Do you have information as to when various denominations began to apply the term ‘reverend’ to preachers?”**

The title “Reverend” has been adopted in many English-speaking denominations as a courtesy designation for clergymen. Higher orders are designated as “Very Reverend,” “Right Reverend,” or “Most Reverend.”

Professor Burton S. Easton, of the General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, has briefly discussed this matter. He notes that only in recent times has the Catholic Church begun to employ “Most Reverend” for its Bishops and Archbishops, while certain priests (of the “Monsignor” rank) are addressed as “Right Reverend.” The Professor contends that the Catholic practice began in Ireland and subsequently spread to America. He believes the usage commenced among Protestants in England in about 1865, and has grown since then (Ferm, 661).

Those who seek to follow the apostolic pattern will reject the use of special name-associated, religious “titles” for two reasons.

## **No New Testament Authority**

First, there is no New Testament authority for the use of such nomenclature. This argument will carry no weight with those who are unconcerned with operating within the bounds of the Lord’s authority; yet, apostolic teaching is clear that one must not venture into the domain of presumptuous religious activity (1 Cor. 4:6 ASV; Col. 3:17; 2 Jn. 9). Christians are warned against religious conduct that is grounded in their personal “will” (cf. “will-worship” — Col. 2:23).

## Clerical Titles Condemned by Christ

Second, *in principle*, the use of “Reverend,” as a clerical title, is condemned by the Lord. In a scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus spoke these words:

“But all their works they do to be seen of men: for they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the chief place at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the salutations in the marketplaces, and to be called of men, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your teacher, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled; and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted” (Mt. 23:5-12).

Clearly the Savior has condemned the use of pompous titles by which Christian men exalt themselves above their fellows.

R. C. H. Lenski, a Lutheran scholar, noted: “Any title that is contrary to [the] equality of brethren in Christ Jesus, even the desire for such a title and honor, is wicked usurpation as far as our one real Teacher is concerned” (899).

Albert Barnes, the noted Presbyterian commentator, expressed a similar sentiment, suggesting that titles like “Doctor of Divinity” fall into the same category.

Nor is it appropriate to refer to the apostles as “Saint Peter” or “Saint Paul”—as some writers and speakers are accustomed to doing. I once heard a flamboyant preacher saturate his sermon with allusions to “Saint Paul” and “Saint Peter.” He slipped up along the way, however, and quoted a passage from “Saint Galatians”!

More than a century ago, A. Lukyn Williams, who authored the scholarly work on Matthew in *The Pulpit Commentary* series, commented that the wearing of such titles partakes of

“that sectarian spirit which began in the primitive Church, when one [person] said, ‘I am of Paul; another, I of Apollos,’ etc. (1 Cor. 1:12), and [this disposition] has continued to this day in the divisions of the one body into innumerable sects and parties, ranged under various leaders, and generally bearing their founder’s name” (397).

The use of a descriptive phrase, e.g. in this sentence, “John Doe, an elder, lives in Chicago?,” is not wrong. But to utilize special titles, “Elder John Doe,” “Rabbi Samuel Goldstein,” or “The Reverend Bob Smith,” cross the line, thus demonstrating the very attitude that Christ rebuked.

One might add, as an aside, that distinctive attire falls under the same sort of condemnation (e.g., the use of robes, clerical collars, special rings, etc.).

In commenting upon the context of Matthew 23, A. T. Robertson, a Baptist writer, observed that some religious leaders are afflicted with “an itch for notice.” He specifically takes note of both “pope” and “priest” who covet the religious recognition of “father” (180).

## **No Biblical Example**

Third, New Testament precedent is against the august titles that the “clergy” so relish. If there was any teacher of the primitive church who might deserve a special appellation, should such have been permissible, surely it would have been Paul, whose scholastic achievements eclipsed those of his Jewish kinsmen (cf. Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:4ff). Yet, when Peter had occasion to refer to his fellow apostle, he did not allude to “Rabbi Saul” or “Doctor Paul,” but simply as — “our beloved brother Paul” (2 Pet. 3:15).

## A Popular But Flawed Argument Against Clerical Titles

As a concluding point, we must not fail to notice that while there is ample evidence against men using the title “Reverend” to set themselves apart from others, a common argument against the use of this expression is exegetically flawed.

It is not unusual to hear this statement...

“Psalm 111:9 says, ‘Holy and reverend is his [God’s] name.’ It is therefore wrong to apply to man that which belongs exclusively to the Lord.”

Though the motive behind the admonition is noble, namely, to reserve appropriate honor to the Creator, the argument is specious.

The Hebrew form rendered “reverend” is *yare*, from the root *yr’*. The term signifies “terror, to be afraid of, to be awed by, to honor, worship,” etc. The stem form is used 485 times in the Old Testament. Most of the time it refers to God (about 80%), though it is used of human beings as well (see: *Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 2.527ff).

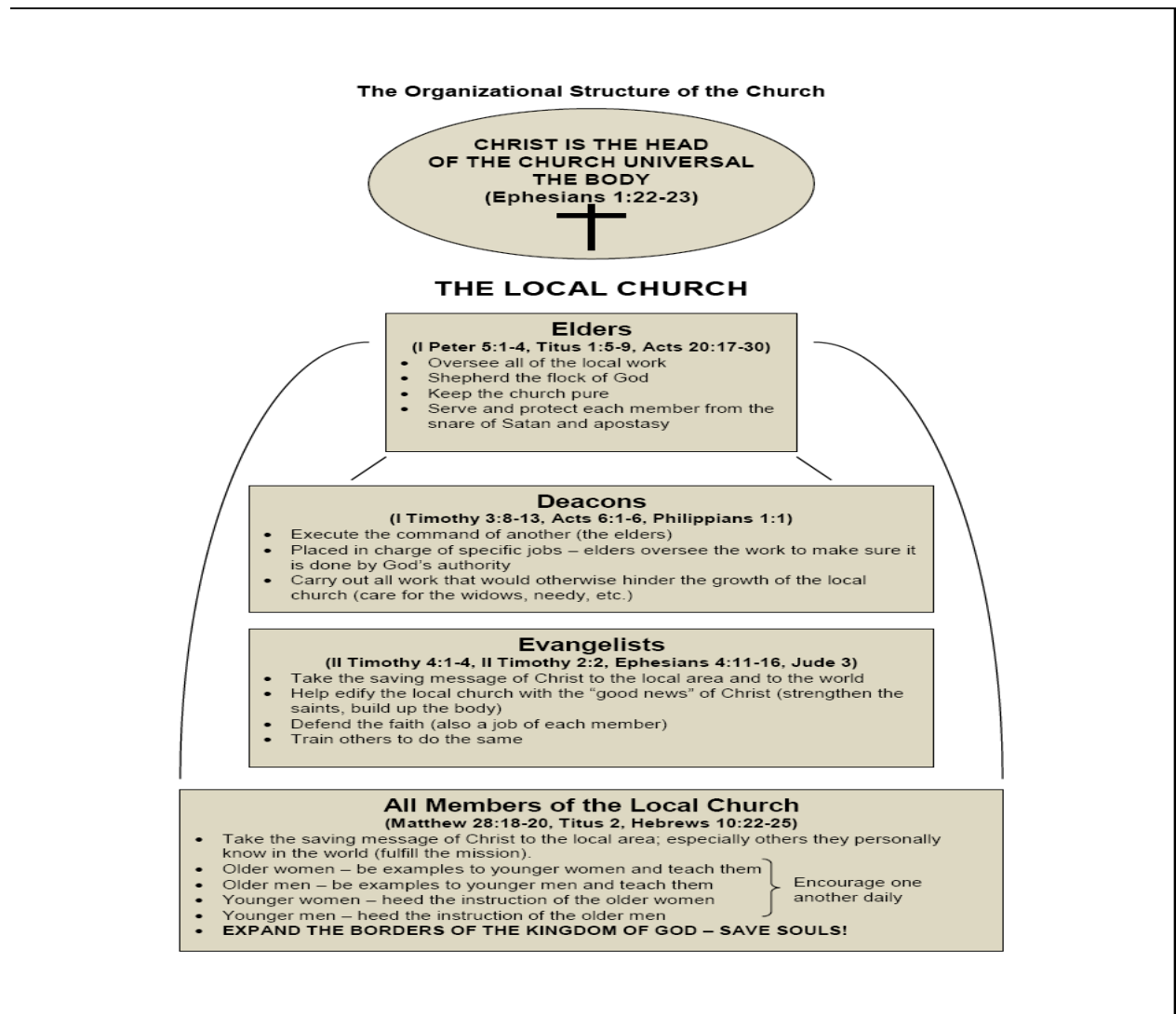
Here are several examples of the term applied to people or things besides God. The Israelite was to “fear” (respect, honor) his parents (Lev. 19:3). Jehovah’s “sanctuary” was to be revered (Lev. 19:30). Both Moses and Joshua had been “feared” (revered, honored) by the Hebrew people (Josh. 4:14).

So, it is **not correct** to contend that *yare* was a sacred term reserved **exclusively** for God.

Moreover, note that in Psalm 111:9 “reverend” and “holy” are joined together. If one contends that “reverend” is restricted to God alone, he might as well allege that the term “holy” should never be used of man. And yet, clearly, that is not the case (cf. Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:15).

While the sincere Bible student wishes to reserve appropriate honor for his Creator, and thus refrain from using unauthorized titles that elevate men beyond what is appropriate, he wants to make sure that his reasoning is sound. This should be borne in mind when dealing with “reverend” in Psalm 111:9.

Note: This article is not intended to suggest that professional titles, such as “Doctor” or “Professor” are inappropriate in medical and/or academic environments.



## Are There Modern-Day Apostles [With Miraculous Powers]?

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D.](#)

The incredible diversity of viewpoint that exists in religion today is startling and disconcerting. We are witnessing a breakdown of respect for authority in American culture, as well as a tremendous increase in personal opinion and feelings as the standard of authority. Consequently, we now have a veritable smorgasbord of doctrinal variety in religion. Such is the nature of pluralism. One is likely to see anything and everything perpetrated in the name of religion and/or Christianity. The only solution to such a situation is to reaffirm the inspiration and authority of the Bible. The Bible is the only written document on this planet that is the standard of authority in life and in religion (see Miller, 1996, pp. 430-446,462-471).

### THE DEFINITION OF AN APOSTLE

Such being the case, we must go to the Bible to determine God's will with regard to modern-day apostles. When we do so, we first learn that the word "apostle" comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means "one sent from or forth, a messenger, delegate" (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 99; Thayer, 1901, p. 68). The term is used in the New Testament in two distinct senses. It can refer to an individual who is sent by other humans to accomplish a particular mission or task. The term is so used to refer, for example, to Barnabas (Acts 14:14). He was an "apostle" in the sense that he accompanied Paul on an evangelistic trip. Jesus is said to be our "Apostle" in the sense that He was sent to atone for our sins (Hebrews 3:1).

The term "apostle" also is used in a second sense—what we might call an **official** sense. That is, "apostle" can refer to individuals who were officially and divinely selected to serve as Jesus' original representatives—"ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Jesus handpicked the original twelve apostles (Matthew 10:1-5; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; 9:1-2). Of these original twelve, Judas betrayed the Lord as predicted by the Old Testament (Psalm 41:9; John 13:18-19; 18:1-5). Instead of repenting, he cinched his apostasy by committing suicide (Matthew 27:3-5; John 17:12). Consequently, a successor to Judas was selected by divine decree (Acts 1:16-26).

Only one other apostle in the official sense is alluded to in the New Testament—Paul. His appointment to apostleship was unique and unparalleled in that he was chosen for a specific first century task (Acts 9:15; 22:14-15; 26:16-18; 1 Corinthians 15:8-9; Galatians 1:11-12,15-16). Christ selected him to introduce the message of Christianity to the Gentile world (Romans 11:13; 15:16; Galatians 2:8; Ephesians 3:8). Paul was careful to document the fact that his apostleship was by divine appointment (e.g., Romans 1:5; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1,16).

### THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE

When one assembles all the relevant New Testament data, at least three qualifications emerge as prerequisite to one becoming an apostle in the official sense (Hayden, 1894, p. 33, expands these credentials to seven in number). First, an apostle had to have seen the Lord and been an eyewitness of Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:22; 22:14; 1 Corinthians 9:1).

Second, an apostle had to be specifically selected by the Lord or the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:5; Mark 3:13-14; Luke 6:13; Acts 1:26; 9:15; 22:14-15,21; 26:16). Third, an apostle was invested with miraculous power to the extent that he could perform miracles. The power to perform miracles included the capability to confer the ability to work miracles to other individuals through the laying on of his hands (Mark 3:15; 16:17-20; Luke 9:1-2; John 14:12,26; 15:24-27; 16:13; Acts 2:43; 4:29-31,33; 5:12,15-16; 6:6; 8:14-18; 19:6; 2 Timothy 1:6; Romans 1:11; Hebrews 2:3-4). Jesus referred to His bestowal of miraculous capability upon the apostles when He promised they would be “endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

## THE WORK OF AN APOSTLE

The apostolic office was unquestionably a temporary office for the early church (though apostolic appointment was for life). Its essential purpose was twofold. First, apostles were commissioned by Jesus to launch the Christian religion (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48). This purpose was achieved by means of the initial presentation of the Gospel to the whole world (Colossians 1:23), and the establishment of the church of Christ (Acts 2). Second, apostles were largely responsible for making the New Testament available—first in oral form and, more specifically, in written form (1 Corinthians 14:37; Galatians 1:12; Ephesians 3:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:14; 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Peter 1:12-21; 3:15-16).

These two central tasks are set forth clearly in the New Testament. In Matthew 16, Jesus declared that He would build His church after His resurrection from hades (vs. 18). He then explained that it would be the apostles who would instigate initial entrance into Christ’s church (hence the significance of “keys”—vs. 19). This commencement of the Christian religion and the church of Christ would be achieved by means of the apostles “binding” and “loosing” the doctrinal tenets and principles of Christianity that Heaven had previously bound or loosed [the Greek uses the perfect passive and should be translated “will have been bound/loosed in Heaven” as in the NASB (cf. Matthew 18:18-20; John 20:22-23)]. Peter and the apostles articulated the terms of entrance into the kingdom of Christ for the first time on the Pentecost that followed Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:14ff.).

In Ephesians 4, after summarizing Christianity in terms of seven core concepts (vss. 1-6), Paul described the initial sequence of events that recounted the advent of Christianity (vss. 7-16). Paul noted that: (1) after His crucifixion, Jesus descended into the Hadean realm; (2) He then was resurrected; (3) He ascended back to Heaven; (4) upon His ascension, He dispensed gifts; (5) the apostolic office was included in the reception of these miraculous capabilities; (6) the purpose of these gifts was to equip and edify the church; (7) the preparation provided to the infant church by these gifts was temporary (“till” is an adverb of time connoting **when** the miraculous gifts were to terminate), in that the same preparation soon would be available through the completed revelation, i.e., “the faith.” [By “completed revelation” we do not mean completed **canon**. We mean that all of God’s communication to humanity would have been revealed. See the New Testament discussion contrasting “mystery” with “made known” (Romans 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 2:7-10; Ephesians 3:1-11). In the meantime, the process of producing copies of the various New Testament documents and circulating them far and wide would have been occurring rapidly and extensively from the very moment of their production by the inspired writers (cf. Colossians 4:16, 1 Timothy 5:18, where Luke 10:7 is already known and classified as “Scripture,” and 2 Peter 3:15-16, where Paul’s epistles are already circulated and recognized as “Scriptures”). Further, the reference to “the faith” in Ephesians 4:13 cannot refer to a time when all people or all Christians will achieve unity in faith. Such a circumstance will never occur. Paul was referring to the time when all people would have access to all of God’s communication to man, thus

giving them the potential for attaining spiritual maturity (“a perfect man” vs. “children”). See [Miller](#), 2003].

Once all of the information necessary to the promotion of the Christian religion was revealed to the early church (through oral means made possible by the distribution of the gifts), the church would have the means available to grow and mature in Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-13). While prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers [the words “pastors and teachers” share the same article in the Greek, and so should likely be construed to mean “pastor-teachers,” i.e., a single function in which pastors (those selected by the local congregation to serve as elders or shepherds) were endowed with the miraculous ability to teach inspired information not yet made available in written form] were part of this early development of Christianity (Ephesians 4:11), the office of an apostle was the primary means by which Christ accomplished the inauguration of His religion.

The apostles had the sole responsibility of executing the will of the Son of God in founding, organizing, and fully equipping the church of Christ on Earth, that she might fulfill her heaven-borne mission, until Jesus comes again (Hayden, p. 22). That is why Paul could say two chapters earlier that the household of God (i.e., the church) was built on the **foundation** of the apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20; cf. 3:5; Revelation 21:14). That is why he informed the Corinthian Christians:

God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:28-30).

The apostles are said to be “first” in the significance and criticality of their divinely appointed role. The apostles specifically described their unique role in the early church as entailing giving themselves to “the word of God” and “the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2,4).

## THE DURATION OF AN APOSTLE

Once the church of Christ was established and Christianity was given its initial presentation (cf. Colossians 1:23), the apostolic office **faded from the scene** along with the age of miracles. As an eyewitness of Christ’s resurrection, Paul referred to himself in relation to the other apostles as “**last of all**” (1 Corinthians 15:8). Neither apostles nor miraculous gifts was needed any longer. They had served their temporary purpose (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:29-31; 13:12; 14:3; Romans 15:18-19; Hebrews 2:3-4; cf. Exodus 4:30). Miraculous gifts functioned as scaffolding while the church was under initial construction, and were removed once the structure had been completed (1 Corinthians 3:10; 13:11; Ephesians 4:13-14). The book we call the Bible is the totality of God’s written revelation to the human race. Consequently, people now have access to **everything they need** (2 Peter 1:3) to enter into a right relationship with God via Christianity and the church of Christ. The apostles “had no official successors. From the nature of their duties, there could be no succession” (Hayden, pp. 20-21). **Apostles, quite simply, are no longer needed!**

## NO APOSTLES TODAY

Unfortunately, several groups that claim affiliation with the Christian religion allege to have apostles among them, including Catholicism, Mormonism, and some pentecostal groups. This claim is unbiblical. No person living today can meet the qualifications given in Scripture for being an apostle. No one living today has been an **eyewitness** of Christ’s resurrection.



Christ has selected no one living today for the apostolic role. No one living today possesses the miraculous capabilities of an apostle. We should not be surprised that people would falsely **claim** to be apostles. Jesus warned that false prophets would come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they would be ravaging wolves (Matthew 7:15). Paul described some of his opponents in these words:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Further warning was issued to the Galatian churches: "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). Anyone claiming to be an apostle today who teaches anything **in addition** to the New Testament is clearly not an apostle of Christ!

Peter added his voice on the same subject: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1). No wonder John admonished: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1; cf. Matthew 24:11,24). In the Revelation, the church at Ephesus was commended because they "tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

Catholicism maintains that Peter was the supreme bishop, even over the other apostles, and that every pope since Peter is an apostolic successor to Peter. The pope is selected after literally hours and days of deliberation by cardinals in the Vatican. The only apostle in the Bible that was not handpicked by Christ in person was Matthias. Yet he was not selected by mere men deliberating and debating his potential. He was selected by the casting of lots—which was simply another way for Jesus to do the selecting (Acts 1:26; cf. Proverbs 16:33).

It is incredible to think that any human beings living today would presume to appoint apostles. In pinpointing the credentials of an apostle, Luke (Acts 1) made it abundantly evident that to qualify as an apostle a person would have to have **seen** the Lord and been an **eyewitness** of His resurrection. That is why Paul was careful to state: "Am I not an apostle? ...Have I not **seen the Lord**?" (1 Corinthians 9:1, emp. added). In recounting his conversion, he quoted Ananias as having said, "The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and **see the Just One**, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14-15, emp. added). What alleged modern-day apostle could make such a claim?

The New Testament also makes clear the fact that an essential characteristic of an apostle was that he had been selected by Deity. When Jesus was on Earth, He handpicked the first twelve apostles. After His departure from Earth, the disciples cast lots to select a successor to Judas. Their method allowed no input from mere humans—except in the recognition that two men possessed all the qualifications necessary to be an apostle. Casting lots allowed **God** to do the selecting. Divine control in the selection process by casting lots was common in Old Testament history (see Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 26:55; 33:54; 34:13; Joshua 14:2; 18:6,10; 19:51; cf. Acts 13:19; 1 Samuel 14:42; Nehemiah 10:34; Psalm 16:5). Solomon claimed: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord" (Proverbs 16:33). Indeed, Peter's prayer on the occasion shows that the decision already had been made by the Lord before the actual casting of lots: "...show which of these two **You have chosen**" (Acts 1:24, emp. added). The summary statement regarding Matthias—"he was

numbered with **the eleven** apostles” (Acts 1:26; cf. Matthew 28:16; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:33)—gives way to a return to the expression “the twelve” (Acts 6:2; cf. Acts 2:14). The text states: “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship” (Acts 1:24-25). Paul also was handpicked by Jesus—to be a “chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15). No human being on Earth today can claim he has been personally singled out and chosen by Jesus to be an apostle.

A third proof that no apostles exist on Earth today is the fact that New Testament apostles were empowered by God—not only to perform miracles—but also to **convey miraculous power to other people** who then could work miracles themselves. This characteristic is demonstrated in detailed fashion in Acts: “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money” (Acts 8:18). The issue of modern-day apostles may be settled very quickly! To authenticate their claim to be apostles, they must be able both to perform miracles as well as confer miraculous power to others. The apostles of Jesus in the New Testament demonstrated their apostolic status without hesitation. Anyone today who claims to be an apostle should be willing to do the same. No such ability exists today.

## ORIGINAL APOSTLES WERE SUFFICIENT

A fascinating passage in the New Testament sheds further light upon this notion of modern-day apostles. That passage is Matthew 19:28. There Jesus informed Peter and the other apostles: “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” A related passage is Luke 22:29-30 which says, “And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as my Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

These verses are Christ’s figurative declarations describing the role of the twelve apostles in the establishment of the church and the dissemination of the gospel proclamation (cf. Bales, 1957, pp. 187-223). The “regeneration” refers to the Christian era, which began at Pentecost, during which time spiritual regeneration became possible through the blood of Christ (Titus 3:5). It is an equivalent expression with the “time of reformation” (Hebrews 9:10). The throne of Christ’s glory refers to His present location at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36; Ephesians 1:20; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:13; 8:1; 10:12-13). The “judging” done by the apostles refers to the rule that the apostles exerted while they were on Earth, setting in place the features of New Testament Christianity (Matthew 16:19; John 20:22-23). The “twelve thrones” refers to their complete authority from Christ to implement Christ’s will until the end of time—which they presently do today **through their authoritative writings—found only in the New Testament**. The “twelve tribes” is a figurative way to refer to the church—the spiritual Israel (Galatians 6:16; James 1:1; cf. Romans 2:28-30; Galatians 3:29).

Neither Christ nor the original apostles needs successors or representatives on Earth today. They continue to rule and reign over the kingdom through the work that they achieved in the first century, and that is preserved for all in the New Testament. Christ is **now** on His throne ruling and reigning. The apostles also are on the thrones assigned to them by Christ. To suggest that the apostles have modern-day successors is to discount and discredit the current rule of the apostles. Neither Christ nor the apostles has abdicated their authority or their current rule to any humans on Earth.

Additionally, the fact that Jesus declared that **all twelve apostles** would occupy thrones in the kingdom proves that Peter had no greater authority than the other apostles. The apostles were **equal** in their reception and wielding of the authority delegated to them by Christ. Yet

the Catholic Church claims that the immediate successors to Peter were Linus (from A.D. 67 to 79), Cletus (from A.D. 79 to 91) and Clement (from A.D. 91 to 100). They agree that the apostle John would have still been alive throughout this period (see G.C. Brewer's discussion as quoted in Bales, pp. 208-210). The doctrine of the primacy of Peter means that the first three of the alleged successors of Peter would have exercised authority over the still-living apostle John—who had been handpicked by Christ Himself! The very John whom Jesus placed on one of the twelve thrones would have been **under** the authority, knowledge, and power of three popes who had not been selected to be among the original Twelve! (see also Hayden, pp. 22-33). Hayden aptly summarized the New Testament position regarding modern-day apostles:

The thirteen apostles chosen, ordained and endowed by the newly crowned Messiah faithfully and fully executed their commission. When they entered into everlasting rest, the church was established, with all needful ministries to edify, extend and perpetuate it throughout all coming centuries. Then the extraordinary, which was necessary to found a new institution, was succeeded by the ordinary, which is sufficient to teach, regulate and govern the subjects of Christ's kingdom according to the laws that went forth from Jerusalem. The revelation of God was completed. The word of faith is henceforth nigh every believer, even in his mouth and in his heart. The apostolic office ceased, and evangelists and pastors became the permanent teachers and superintendents of the church (pp. 33-34).

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## WHAT IS HAPPENING WHEN PEOPLE ARE BEING ‘SLAIN IN THE SPIRIT TODAY’?

Since we can conclude it is not found in the Bible, there must be other factors at work. After 26 years of personally experiencing, or being a part of tens of thousands of “slayings”, I’ve come to find that five conclusions quantify what in the world is going on when people fall under this supposed power.

**I. People think they have to fall down** – Peer pressure at these sort of services is intense. Nobody wants to look bad or make the preacher look bad. It is widely believed that there is something wrong with you if you don’t “feel” God’s presence and have a manifestation of some sort, so peer pressure plays a huge factor in falling. Sadly, kids end up being the biggest loser in this forced behavior as they seek to please and soon are brainwashed into the system. In many cases, people see other people falling and just follow suit. Finally, it is common for seekers who come to these services to think they have to fall down in order to get the experience that the preacher is promising.

**II. People are told they are going to fall down** – The power of suggestion and hypnosis is real. Documentaries like “Miracles for Sale” have proven that the power of suggestion and hypnosis can be used to make complete strangers do whatever the hypnotist commands. This isn’t news to those with an understanding of psychology and social science but many Christians are still unaware that many charismatic extremists who slay people in the spirit are experts at hypnosis and manipulation. Three hours of sensual and soothing music, countless bursts of saying, “Jesus is here! He is going to touch you! You are going to feel something you’ve never felt before! Just receive it!”, gets people in the mood. Then, they are ripe for the picking. Hypnosis is also proven to put people in a trance-like state – something common at these services.

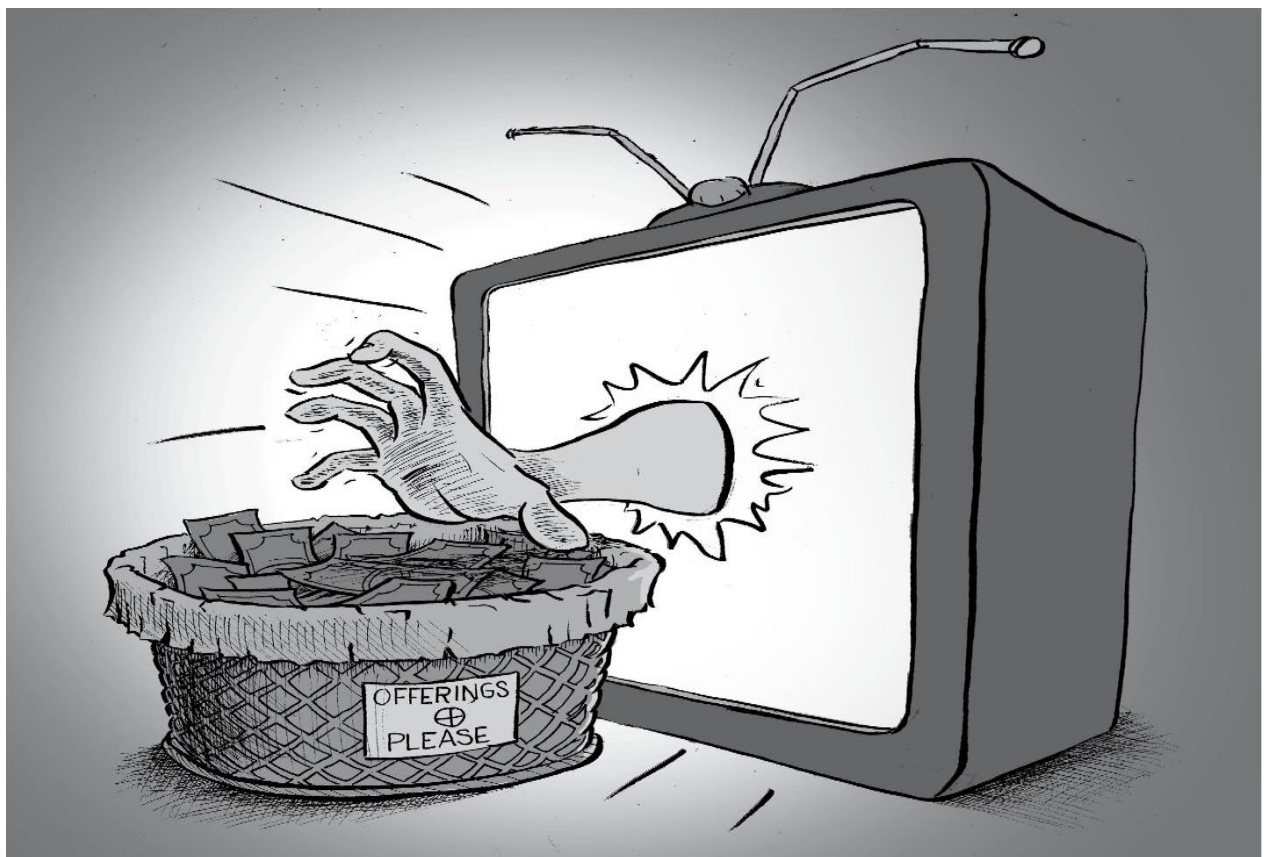
**III. People want to fall down** – Reverence is a big deal in Third Wave, N.A.R., and charismatic extremist circles. People are taught to honor leaders in a god-like fashion because they are literally on His level. Many former followers in these movements have admitted that they wanted a deeper connection with God, and wanted the anointing that was being promised by the leader – so they chose to fall in hopes of having a spiritual experience. This often leads to the weeping, praying, and emotional responses seen after the pastor lays his hands on them.

**IV. People are faking it** – I’ve personally interacted with friends, family, and followers who have faked it. By the grace of God, people who don’t grow up in charismatic chaos have no idea this happens but when you grow up with a special anointing service every week and it lasts 4 hours a shot – you start falling just to get it over with. I once asked someone close to me why they threw themselves back and acted so crazy on the platform to which he claimed, “Come on man, we gotta make him look good and get this over with.” Make no mistake about it, people fake it. - MYTHBUSTERS

# ***FAITH HEALING: HOW'S IT WORK?***



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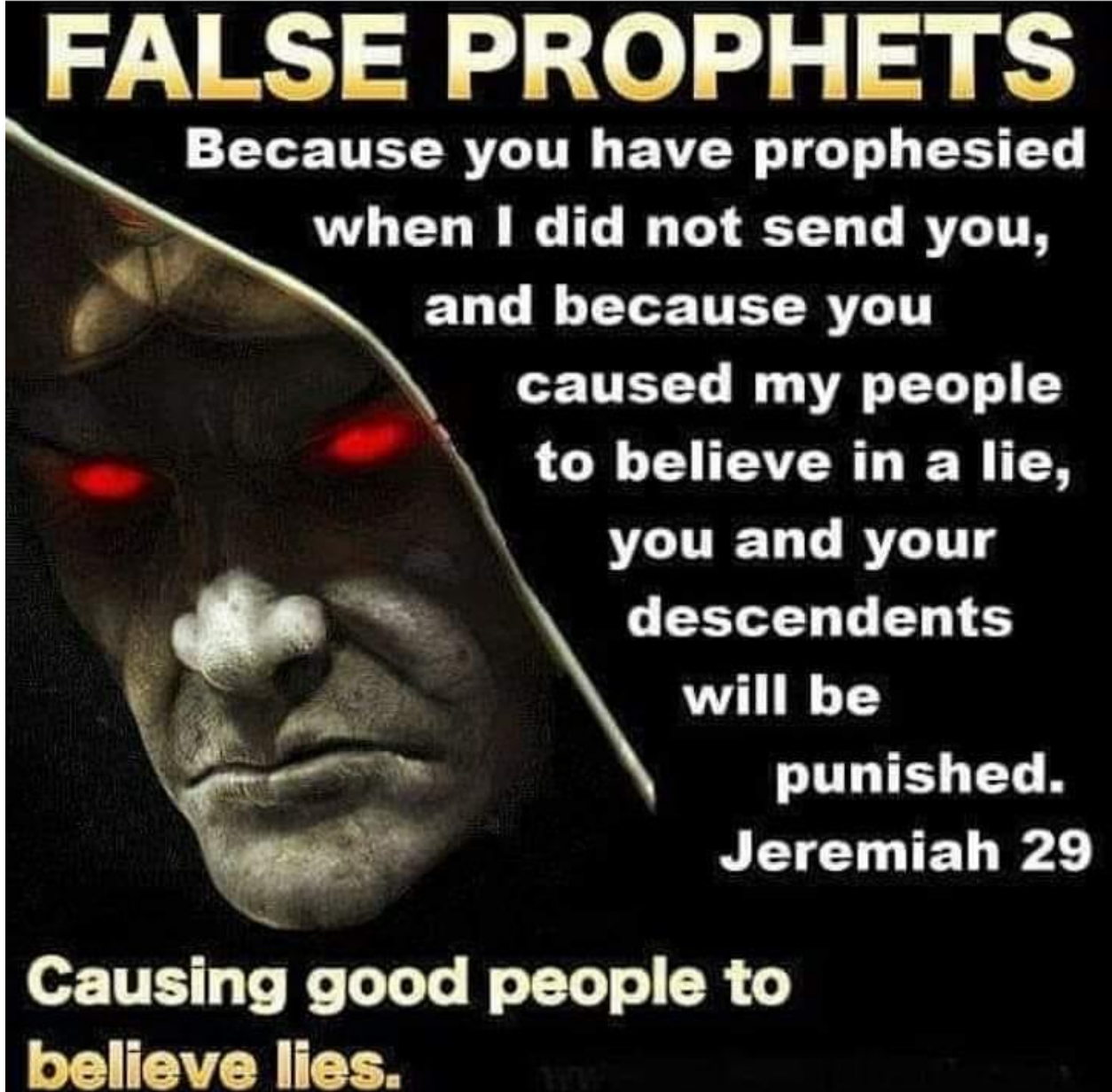


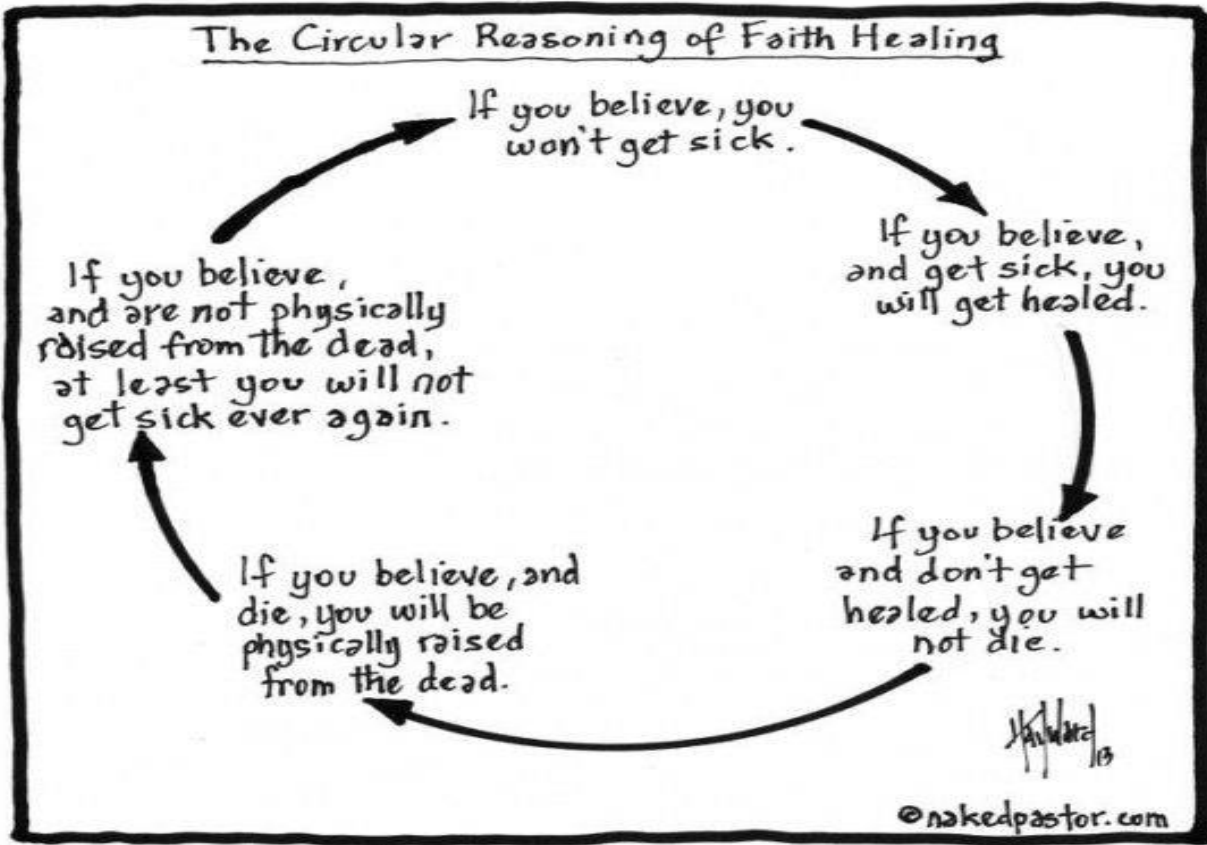


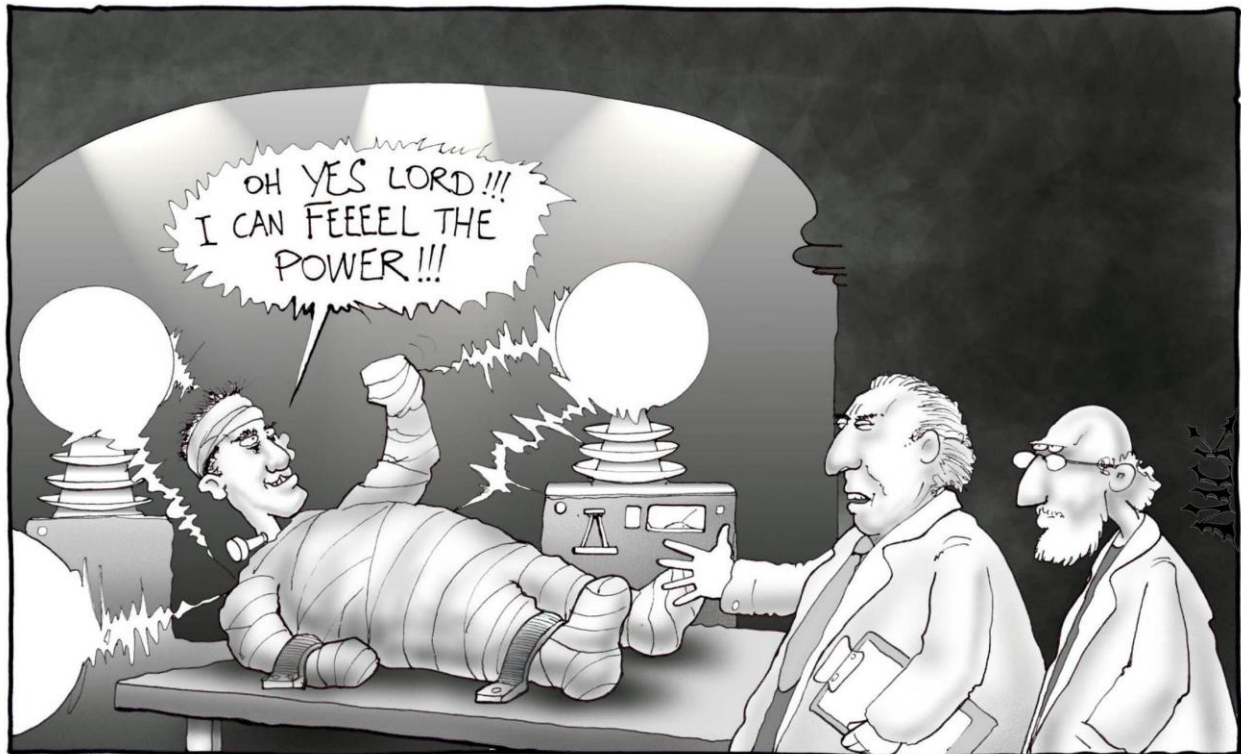
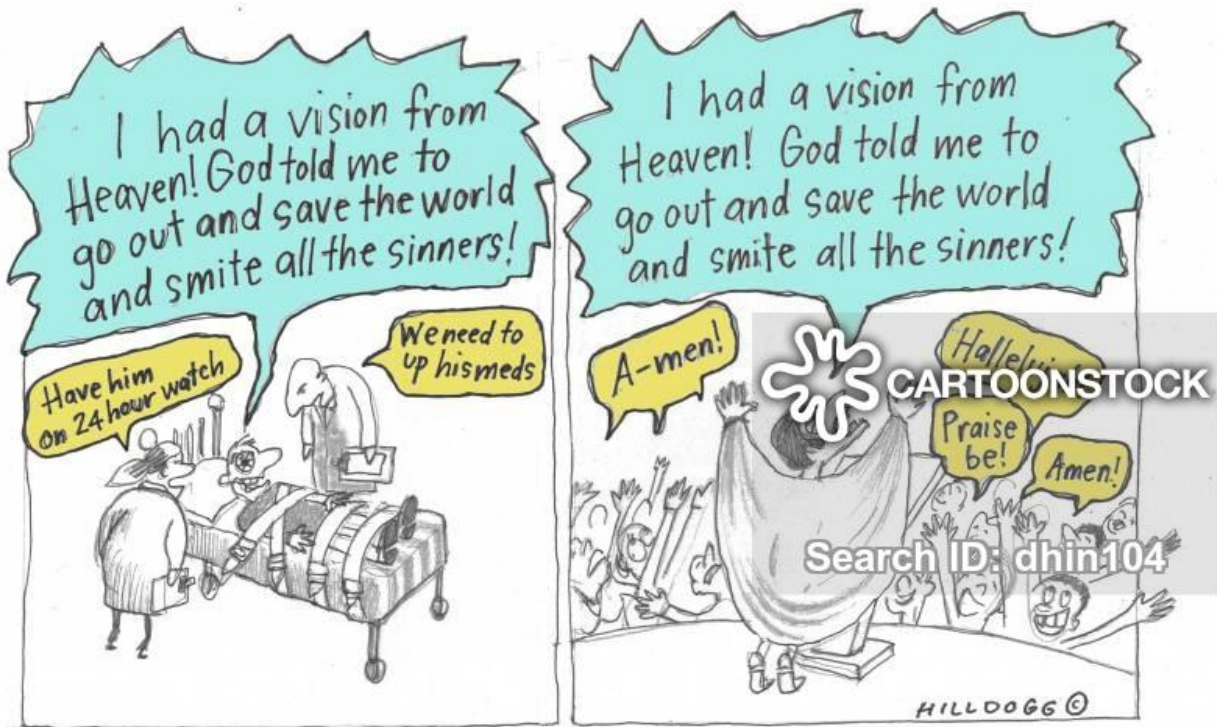
# **FALSE PROPHETS**

**Because you have prophesied  
when I did not send you,  
and because you  
caused my people  
to believe in a lie,  
you and your  
descendents  
will be  
punished.  
Jeremiah 29**

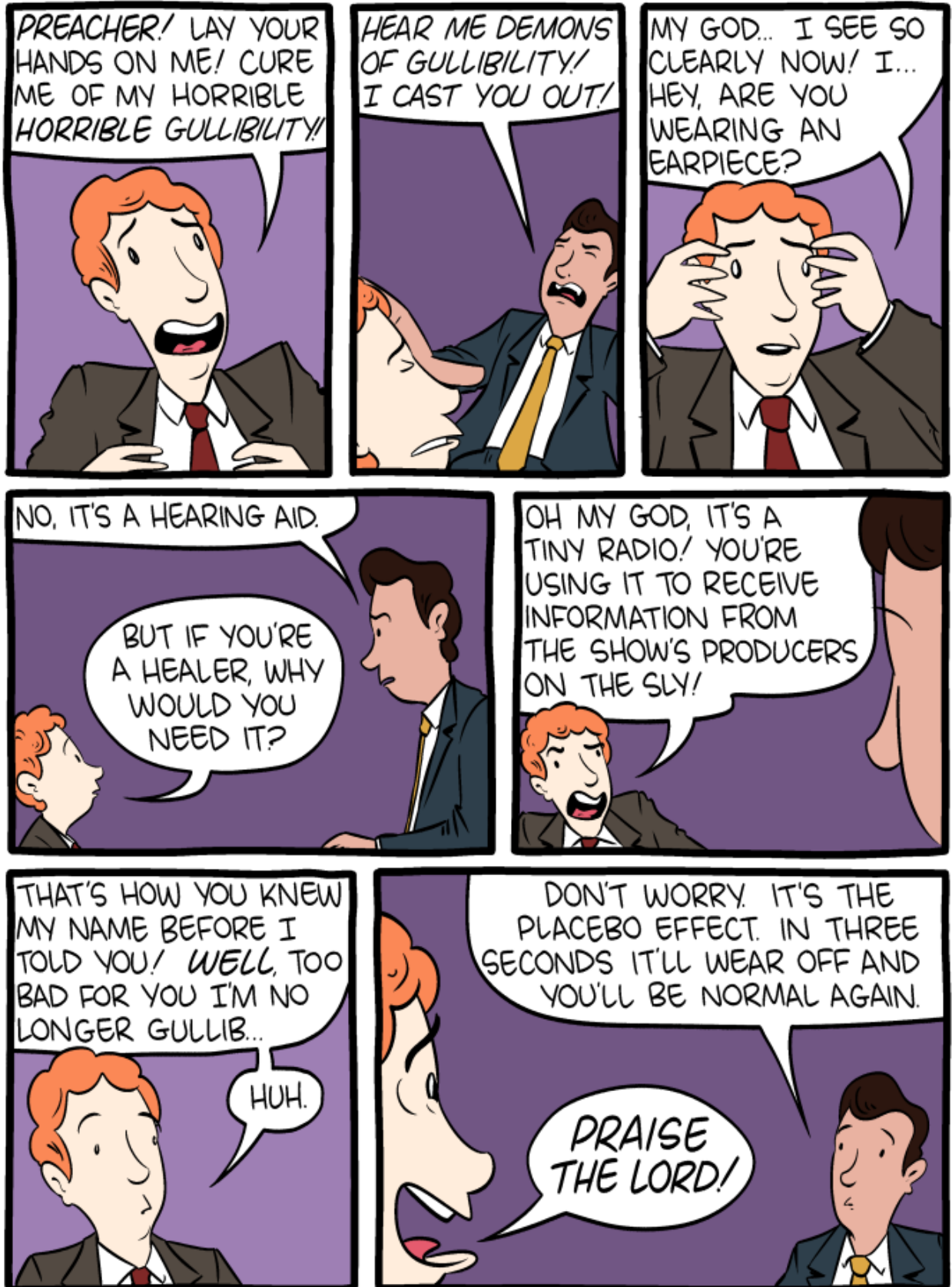
**Causing good people to  
believe lies.**





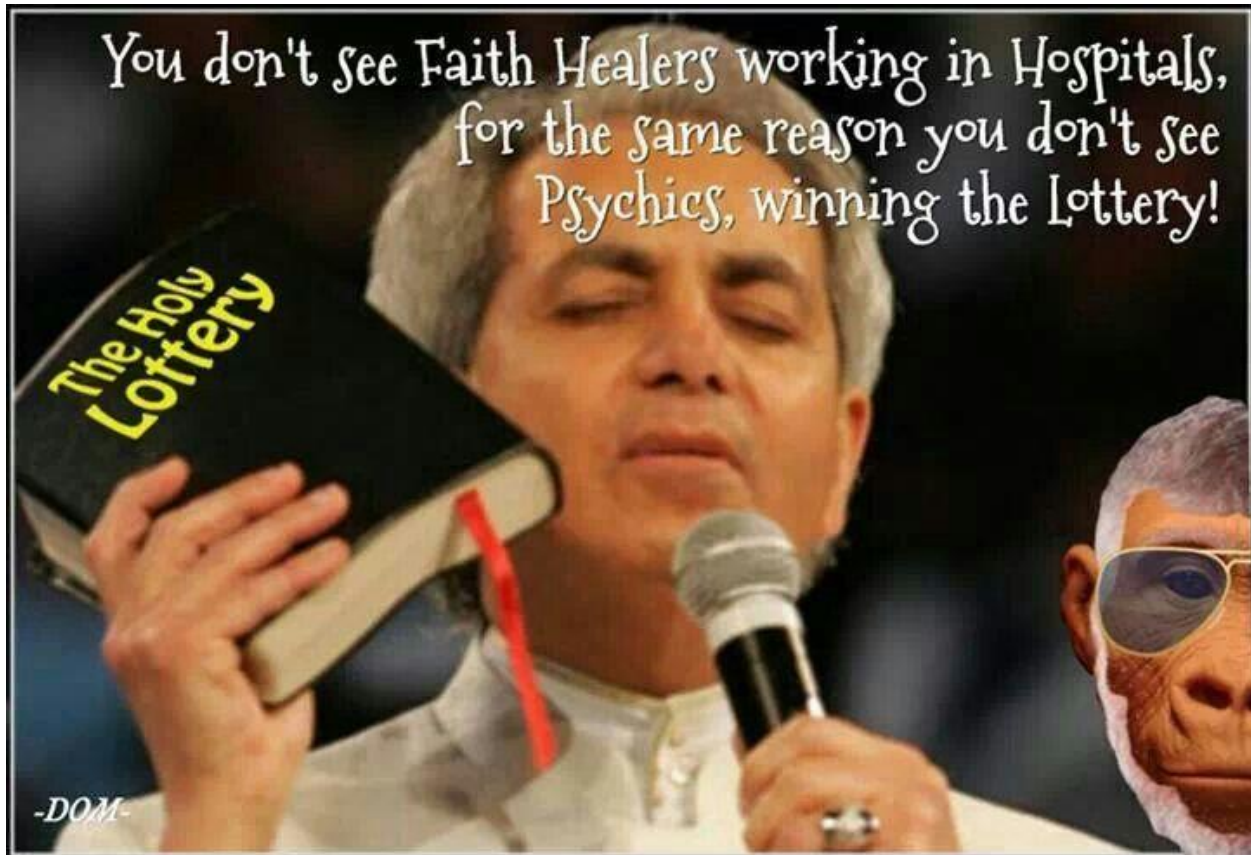


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# Defenses of Faith Healers

Posted by [Mark Mayberry](#) August 2, 2012

By Frank Jamerson

When Scripture is quoted to show that miraculous gifts accomplished their purposes and ceased, those who believe in faith healers make several responses. We will notice some of them and reply to them.

The first response is usually, “Don’t you believe that God has the power to heal?” When we challenge faith healers, we are not denying God’s power to do whatever he chooses. God has the power to make men out of dust and women out of ribs, and he once did it, but he is not doing that any more! The Devil knew that Jesus had power to turn stones into bread, but the fact is that he did not choose to do so. He did produce water out of a rock for Moses, but faith healers never have duplicated that one. The question is not whether he has the power to do what he chooses, but what does the Bible say about miraculous gifts?

Another frequent response is, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Then the conclusion is inferred that if he ever gave miraculous gifts to men he must continue to do so, or he has changed. This is a classic case of “proof-texting” – taking a verse out of context to try to prove a preconceived opinion. The verse was written to give assurance to Christians that God would be with them and that the Christ who had been preached to them by others has not been superceded and would never change. This does not prove that God’s ways have never changed. In fact, the same writer had earlier written, “For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law” (Heb. 7:12). The fact that God changed his law did not mean that God has changed. Paul wrote the Corinthians that when “the perfect” (the completed revelation) came, then that which is “in part”

(partial revelations) would cease (1 Cor. 13:10). Faith healers try to make “that which is perfect” refer to Christ and the second coming, but even if it did refer to that, it would not fit their interpretation of Hebrews 13:8. The passage says that Jesus would remain the same “forever,” and that would include after the second coming! So, according to their argument that miraculous gifts cannot cease because Jesus is “the same yesterday, today and forever,” miraculous gifts will have to continue eternally.

The favorite argument of many faith healers today is that physical healing is in the atonement and all a person has to do is “claim his healing.” They misuse Matthew 8:16,17, which is used of the work Jesus did before the atonement. The death of Christ was for forgiveness of sins, not physical healing. “Who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). If physical healing is in the atonement, then it should be as universal as spiritual healing! What sick person would not “claim physical healing” if it was as available as forgiveness? A little bit of “good old country honesty” would help here! Why did Paul not “claim his healing” if it was in the atonement (2 Cor. 12:7-10)? Why did he leave Trophimus at Miletus sick (2 Tim. 4:20), instead of telling him to “claim his healing”? Why aren’t all who claim to be saved by faith healers today also healed of their infirmities? They should have no sick disciples if their doctrine is correct! (One sure way to know whether your sins were forgiven would be if you could “take up your bed and walk!” Instead, they have many devout believers who continue on their beds.)

Another response is, “Don’t you believe in the power of prayer?” The implication here is that if you do not believe in miraculous gifts today, then you do not believe in praying for the sick. This does not follow at all. We believe in praying for our “daily bread” (Matt. 6:11), but we do not expect to receive it like the Israelites received manna (Exod. 16:4),

or like Elisha multiplied the widow's oil (2 Kgs. 4:1-7). God can answer prayers through his providence. We believe in praying for prosperity and health (3 Jn. 2), but God does not have to preform a miracle in order to answer these requests. God answers prayer, but he has not promised miraculous powers to men today. There is a difference between "divine healing" (which the Bible teaches) and , 'miraculous healing" (which has ceased).

Faith healers claim that "power will go forth from my hands," but when they fail, the tune changes to "I have no power, God does the healing." In this they tell the truth! They do not have any power, and that is a contrast to what the apostles claimed. Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). Peter was authorized by Jesus to perform miracles and he plainly said that he had that power. The apostles also could lay hands on others and give them that power (Acts 8:18), but those claiming miraculous powers today have not had the hands of an apostle laid on them and they cannot do what the apostles did.

The apostles of Christ used miracles to prove that the message that they preached was from God (Mk. 16:15-20). Faith healers today use the word to try to prove that they can do miracles. The miracles of the apostles confirmed the terms of salvation - "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Faith healers deny the message that was confirmed, teach salvation by faith only, and argue that they have apostolic powers!

Guardian of Truth XXXVI: 7, p. 212  
April 2, 1992



# “Faith Healer,” Heal Thyself

Posted by [Mark Mayberry](#) May 4, 2012

By Donald P. Ames

During a recent visit to one of the local hospitals to see some there who were sick, I looked up and was surprised to see Steve Dyson, Minister of the United Pentecostal Church in Newport, Arkansas. Mr. Dyson and I have been acquainted, and good friends, as a result of the fact our radio broadcasts on Sunday morning are within a half-hour of each other and also because of mutual acquaintances in the past. Yet, neither of us has had any hesitation in opposing what we believe to be false doctrine regarding the positions taken by the other (although Steve Dyson has let it be known he has no desire to engage in a public discussion of these differences). I point this out to note that one can disagree without always being disagreeable, and that friendship does not mean that one must appease the falsehoods taught by others (Gal. 1:10).

But, to return to the discussion at hand, I enquired from Mr. Dyson as to the nature of his visit and problem; and learned that his throat was swollen and so sore that he could hardly swallow. I then asked him, since the Pentecostals believe they have the ability to perform miracles today as the apostles did in the times of the N.T., why didn't he just heal himself? The only reply I got was that “even Paul had his `thorn in the flesh.’ ” This was the same reply I received from Bill Lewis, Minister of the First Apostolic Church (same fellowship) in Aurora, Illinois when he lost his voice during a debate with Larry Hafley (see my report on the Hafley-Lewis-Bishop Debate, Truth Magazine, July 20, 1970), and also when he later had to undergo heart surgery and was laid up for about six months.

Now, I am wondering about their consistency in using this passage in light of what Paul actually said-and why-in 2 Cor. 12. Paul received his “thorn in the flesh” because he had been caught up into the third heaven, and this “messenger of Satan” was to buffet him, “lest I should be exalted above measure.” What had happened to him in this instance was not something that was common to man, and therefore God used this “thorn in the flesh” to keep him humble. Did either Mr. Lewis or Mr. Dyson experience such a glorious view of the third heaven? Surely they will not contend that problems of being “a great speaker” necessitated God going to such measures-nor that they are so much greater than others that God had to go to such measures to make them learn the lesson of humility (and not do the same to their fellow-man as well).

Secondly, when Paul sought the Lord for relief, He replied, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:9), and from this Paul concluded, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” However, both Mr. Dyson and Mr. Lewis sought relief at the hands of a medical doctor. Now, if they are going to use part of a passage, why not use the rest? If God will not heal their infirmities, why not accept the fact “My grace is sufficient for thee”? Or, do they think they can circumvent the “judgment of God” by obtaining relief from another source and thus destroy God’s “purpose” in giving them this “thorn in the side”? The very fact Paul and others of the apostolic age had physical ailments that were not healed (Phil. 2:27, 1 Tim. 5:23, 2 Tim. 4:20, 2 Cor. 12:7) is evidence that physical healing was not the goal of Christ, but that these miracles were to confirm the word (Mk. 16:20, Heb. 2:4), and that not even the apostles could use them for other purposes (such as their own healing or general healing)-and that once that word had been confirmed, the miracles were to cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10, Eph. 4:11-13, Jas. 1:25, Jn. 20:30-31). It would seem that being caught in such a contradictory position would cause some of these “faith healers” to take another look at their own doctrine in light of the Word of God (see Rom. 10:2).

| <b>MIRACLES CONFIRM THE WORD</b> |   |   |  |
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| <b>PASSAGE</b>                   | <b>MESSAGE</b>  | <b>CONFIRMATION</b>   | <b>RESPONSE</b>  |
| Acts 4:29-32                     | "Speak Your Word with all boldness"                                       | "by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be done"                                | "those who believed were of one heart and soul"                              |
| Acts 8:5-12                      | "the things spoken by Philip;"<br>"Philip...preached Christ"              | "hearing and seeing the miracles which he did"  | "they believed Philip as he preached the things...and were baptized"         |
| Acts 13:7-12                     | "sought to hear the word of God"  | "You shall be blind, not seeing"  | "the proconsul believed...being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord"      |
| Acts 14:2-3                      | "speaking boldly in the Lord"   | "The Lord...was bearing witness to the word...granting signs/wonders to be done"                            | "a great multitude...believed"   |
| Romans 15:18-19                  | "I have fully preached the gospel of Christ"                              | "in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God"  | "to make the Gentiles obedient"  |
| 1 Corinthians 2:4-5              | "my speech and my preaching"  | "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power"   | "that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" |
| 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6            | "our gospel did not come to you in word only"                             | "but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance"   | "you became followers of us and the Lord, having received the word"          |
| Hebrews 2:1-4                    | "so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord" | "God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" | "give the more earnest heed"   |
| Mark 16:15-20                    | "preach the gospel...they went out and preached...the word"               | "the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs"                         | "he who believes and is baptized will be saved"                              |
| John 2:22                        | "He had said this...the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said"      | "when he had risen from the dead"   | "they believed"  |
| John 2:23                        | "in His name"   | "they saw the signs which He did"   | "many believed"  |

# Modern-Day Miracles, Tongue-Speaking, and Holy Spirit Baptism: A Refutation--EXTENDED VERSION

by [Dave Miller, Ph.D.](#)

Numerous religious groups commonly claim the assistance of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Famed religious television personalities boldly announce the active influence of the Holy Spirit even as they speak. Supposedly, the Holy Spirit talks to them personally, heals viewers instantaneously, and enables them to babble uncontrollably in an “unknown tongue.” All of this is claimed to be “proof positive” of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Do miracles still happen? Can people speak in tongues today? Does God, in the 21st century, supernaturally countermand the laws of nature and heal people miraculously?

“Come now, and let us reason together.” (Isaiah 1:18). It is absolutely imperative that we examine **Scripture**—not our feelings, not what someone else says happened to them, and not our own experience. The only sure and certain approach is to ask: What does the Bible teach? The reader must ask: “Do I honestly believe the Bible to be the Word of God?” Answers to critical questions of human existence require that a person be willing to spend time in the Word, “rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). One must “search the scriptures” (Acts 17:11). One must be honest and willing to go where the evidence takes him. If you had to choose between what you genuinely think you have experienced or seen firsthand and what the Bible actually says, which would you choose? You must ask yourself: “Will I honestly accept God’s written Word on the matter of miracles?” If you will, I invite you to join me in an examination of what the Bible teaches pertaining to miracles.

## THE DEFINITION OF MIRACLES

First of all, what exactly is a “miracle”? How does the Bible use the word? The three central terms used in the Bible to designate a supernatural (as contrasted with a natural) manifestation are: (1) “miracle” (*dunamis*); (2) “sign” (*semeion*); and (3) “wonder” (*teras*). All three terms occur together in Acts 2:22, Hebrews 2:4, and 2 Corinthians 12:12. Related terms include “work” (*ergon*) and “mighty deed” (*kratos*). The occurrence of a miracle in the Bible meant that God worked **outside** the laws of nature. W.E. Vine, whose Greek scholarship, according to F.F. Bruce, was “wide, accurate and up-to-date” (Vine, 1952, Foreword), stated that “miracle” (*dunamis*) is used in the New Testament of “works of a **supernatural** origin and character, such as could not be produced by **natural** agents and means” (1952, p. 75, emp. added). Otfried Hofius noted that a “sign” (*semeion*) “contradicts the **natural** course of things” (1976, 2:626, emp. added) and, similarly, “wonder” (*teras*) referred to events that “contradict the ordered unity of **nature**” (2:633, emp. added). Thus a miracle in the Bible was not merely an event that was astonishing, incredible, extraordinary, or unusual—like the the birth of a baby, or a flower, or the narrow avoidance of an accident. A miracle in the Bible was a **supernatural** act. It was an event that was contrary to the usual course of nature (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 755). The miraculous is not to be confused with the **providential**, where God operates **within** the usual course of nature.

## THE DESIGN OF MIRACLES

Second, it is absolutely imperative that one recognizes the **purpose** of the miraculous. Miracles in the New Testament served the singular function of **confirmation**. When an

inspired speaker stepped forward to declare God's Word, God **validated** or **endorsed** the speaker's remarks by empowering the speaker to perform a miracle. Many New Testament passages articulate this fact quite plainly. For example, the apostles "went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and **confirming** the word by the **signs** that followed" (Mark 16:20, emp. added). The Hebrews writer asked: "[H]ow shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be **spoken** by the Lord, and was **confirmed** to us by those who heard, God also **bearing witness** both with **signs and wonders**, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews 2:3-4). Referring to the initial proclamation of the Gospel to the Samaritans, Luke stated: "And the multitudes with one accord heeded **the things spoken** by Philip, hearing and seeing the **miracles** which he did" (Acts 8:6). The apostles prayed to God: "[G]rant to Your servants that with all boldness they may **speak Your word**, by stretching out Your hand to **heal**, and that **signs and wonders** may be done" (Acts 4:29-30). These passages, and many others (e.g., Acts 13:12; 14:3; 15:12; Romans 15:18-19; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; cf. Exodus 4:30), show that the purpose of miracles was to **authenticate** the oral/spoken word as God's Word. Miracles **legitimized** and **verified** the teaching of God's messengers, as over against the many false teachers (like Simon in Acts 8:9, or Pharaoh's magicians in Exodus 7:11) who attempted to mislead the people. In the late 19th century, Greek lexicographer Joseph Thayer worded this point well when he noted that "sign" (*semeion*) was used in the New Testament "of miracles and wonders by which God authenticates the men sent by him, or by which men prove that the cause they are pleading is God's" (1901, p. 573). Even the miracles that Jesus performed were designed to back up His claim (i.e., spoken words) to be deity. Consider two examples: (1) Using the parallel term "works" (a key word in the book of John), Jesus remarked to Philip, "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? the **words** that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his **works**. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me: or else believe Me for the very **works'** sake" (John 14:10-11, emp. added); (2) Nicodemus said to Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no one can do these **signs** that thou doest except God be with him" (John 3:2, emp. added). This pattern is repeated in the New Testament many times over (e.g., John 2:23; 5:36; 6:14; 7:31; 10:37-38, 41-42; 20:30-31; Acts 2:22). In other words, Jesus performed signs and miracles to prove His divine identity and thereby authenticate His message. His message, in turn, generated faith in those who chose to believe His teachings (cf. Romans 10:17). Here is the consistent sequence presented in Scripture:

### Signs → Word → Faith

(1) Signs confirmed the Word; (2) the Word was presented to hearers; and (3) faith was created (by the Word) in those who received it.

An excellent demonstration of this process is provided by Luke in his report of the conversion of the Roman proconsul, Sergius Paulus. Elymas the sorcerer attempted to thwart Paul's effort to teach Sergius the Gospel. So Paul performed a miracle by striking Elymas blind. Luke next recorded: "Then the proconsul, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the **teaching** of the Lord" (Acts 13:12, emp. added). One might well expect the text to have said that Sergius was astonished at the **miracle** that Paul performed. But Luke was careful to report the situation with precision. The miracle that Paul performed captured Sergius' attention, causing him to recognize the divine origin of Paul's Gospel message. The Gospel message, in turn, generated faith in the proconsul—in harmony with Paul's later affirmation to Christians in Rome that faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Over and over again in the New Testament, a close correlation is seen between the performance of miracles and the preaching of the Word of God (cf. Mark 6:12-13; Luke 9:2,6).

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| Acts 13:7-12                     | "sought to hear the word of God"  | "You shall be blind, not seeing"  | "the proconsul believed...being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord"      |
| Acts 14:2-3                      | "speaking boldly in the Lord"   | "The Lord...was bearing witness to the word...granting signs/wonders to be done"                            | "a great multitude...believed"   |
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| 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6            | "our gospel did not come to you in word only"                             | "but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance"   | "you became followers of us and the Lord, having received the word"          |
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### Other Purposes: Super-Spiritual?

But some maintain that there are other reasons for divine healing and tongue-speaking. Some say tongue-speaking is a sign that the tongue-speaker is super-spiritual. Others say miraculous healing serves the purpose of making the believer well—a mere act of mercy to relieve his pain and suffering. They say God does not want us to suffer, and so He will heal us just to ease our pain in this life because we are His children.

Regarding the first claim, in Paul's admonitions directed to the church of Christ at Corinth, he insisted that the person who possessed the ability to speak in tongues was not spiritually superior to the one who had no such ability. The tongue-speaker had a responsibility to utilize his gift appropriately, i.e., to help others (1 Corinthians 14:6,9,12,19). His gift no more placed him in a spiritually superior position than did any other gift possessed by any other member—whether the ability was miraculous or non-miraculous (1 Corinthians 12:11-27). Tongue-speaking was simply one miraculous capability among many bestowed by God without regard to a member's spiritual status, let alone his spiritual **superiority** over another member (1 Corinthians 12:7-11,28-30).

### Other Purposes: To Make Well?

Regarding the second claim, certainly, the compassion of God was evident when people received miraculous healing in New Testament times. And, surely, relief from suffering would have been a side effect of being healed. But the Bible teaches that **relieving suffering was not the purpose of miracles**. Such a purpose would contradict—even thwart—the divine intent of this created Earth as a place where hardship exists to prepare us for eternity (see Warren, 1972). Death and sin entered the world due to human choice, and God allows the circumstances caused by human decisions to take their course. God is not going to interfere with the natural order of things to show partiality to some over others. The Christian is subject to the same diseases, the same tragedies, and the same physical death that befall non-Christians: “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). The Bible, in fact, warns Christians that they can **expect** to be the recipients of all sorts of hardship, opposition, temptation, and suffering (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-17). Commenting on the purpose of miracles, J.W. McGarvey wrote: “[T]o say that they were wrought for the single purpose of showing divine compassion toward the sick, and those oppressed by the devil, would be to ignore a purpose which is easily discerned, which is openly avowed by Christ himself, and which is of much greater importance (1910, p. 354). That purpose was “to support his proclamation...a necessary proof of the claim of Jesus” (pp. 355-356).

If God's intention was to exempt Christians from sickness and disease, He certainly has fallen down on the job, since the vast majority of Christians throughout the last 2,000 years have experienced the exact same afflictions suffered by unbelievers. If miracles in the first century had as their object to improve the health or physical well-being of the recipient, then Jesus and the apostles were failures, because they left untouched a lot of sick and dying folk! Jesus healed the minority of the sick people of Palestine, and healed **none** outside of that tiny geographical region (with the exception of the Canaanite woman's daughter). In fact, one would be forced to conclude that God's compassion did not extend to **everybody**. But the Bible affirms that **God loves the entire world of humanity** (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). Hence, miracles did not have as their central purpose to demonstrate God's compassion, nor to ease pain, sickness, and suffering. Writing in 1898, McGarvey made the following observations:

[U]nlike these modern advocates of “divine healing,” the apostles were never known to go about exhorting people to come forward for the healing of the body. They effected miraculous cures in a few instances, “as a sign to the unbelievers,” but they never proclaimed, either to saints or sinners, that the healing of all diseases was a part of the gospel which they were sent to preach. These so-called faith-cure churches, therefore, and the preachers who officiate in them as “divine healers,” or what not, are not modeled after the apostolic type, but are misleading the people by humbuggery (p. 351).

### Insufficient Faith?

The usual rebuttal to these observations is that the reason some people do not receive a miracle is that “they do not have sufficient faith.” But this objection is likewise unscriptural. It is true that some individuals in the New Testament were commended for the faith that they possessed **prior** to being the recipient of a miracle (e.g., Mark 5:34). It does not automatically follow, however, that faith was a **necessary** prerequisite to miraculous reception. Many people were **not** required to have faith as a prerequisite. For example, all individuals who were raised from the dead obviously were not in a position to “have faith” (e.g., John 11:44). Nor did those possessed by demons have faith before being healed, since they were not in their right mind (e.g., Luke 9:42; 11:14). The man who was blind from birth actually showed uncertainty regarding the identity of Jesus (John 9:11-12, 17, 25, 35-36). The man who was healed by Jesus as he laid beside a pool of water, in fact, did not even know who healed him (John 5:13). On one occasion, Jesus healed a paralytic after observing, not **his** faith, but the faith of **his companions** (Mark 2:5). Additional texts indicate that many who received the benefits of miracles were not required to have faith (Luke 13:12; 14:4; Acts 3:1-10).

The opposite was true as well. There were individuals who possessed faith, and yet were not healed of their ailments. The apostle Paul obviously had plenty of faith. He had an “infirmity” that was so painful that he called it “a thorn in the flesh” and “a messenger of Satan” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Yet his earnest prayers to God for relief did not result in his being healed. Timothy was a faithful and effective servant of the Lord. He had “frequent illnesses” and stomach trouble of such severity as to warrant Paul referring to it by inspiration. But rather than simply healing him, or telling him to “pray for healing,” Paul advised him to use a little wine as a tonic (1 Timothy 5:23). Another Christian worker and companion of Paul in his evangelistic travels, Trophimus (Acts 20:4; 21:29), had to be left at Miletus due to his sickness (2 Timothy 4:20). Epaphroditus was an extremely valuable worker in the kingdom of Christ, so much so that Paul referred to him as “my brother and fellow-worker and fellow-soldier...and minister to my need” (Philippians 2:25). When he became sick “nigh unto death” (Philippians 2:27,30)—likely due to his exhausting kingdom activity and service to Paul—Paul did not heal him. These examples demonstrate that personal faith was not prerequisite to the reception of a miracle in the first century. Miracles were inextricably bound to the authentication of the spoken Word of God.

But what about those verses that seem to indicate that faith **did** have something to do with whether a miracle would be forthcoming? For instance, what of Matthew’s observation that when Jesus went to His own country, He “did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matthew 13:58)? Notice that the text cannot be correlating the presence of the miraculous with the presence of belief. After all, “not many” implies that **some** miracles were performed—even though unbelief was rampant. The point that Matthew was making, therefore, was that when Jesus performed a few miracles to authenticate His oral claim to deity, the evidence was rejected, making it superfluous for Christ to offer any further miraculous demonstrations. Albert Barnes explained this matter succinctly:



We are not to suppose that his [Jesus—DM] **power** was limited by the belief or unbelief of men; but they were so **prejudiced**, so set against him, that they were not in a condition to **judge of evidence** and to be convinced. ... It would have been of no use, therefore, in proving **to them** that he was from God, to have worked miracles. ... He gave sufficient proof of his mission, and left them in their chosen unbelief without excuse (1956, p. 150, emp. in orig.).

Jesus was simply doing what He instructed the Twelve to do: “whatsoever place shall not receive you, and they hear you not, ...shake off the dust that is under your feet” (Mark 6:11). He also had said: “[N]either cast your pearls before the swine” (Matthew 7:6). If performing additional miracles would have confirmed the Word, Jesus would have performed them.

John actually settled this question for the unbiased searcher. He worded the thematic statement of his Gospel record in the following words: “Many other **signs** therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, **that ye may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name” (John 20:30-31, emp. added). John said that belief occurs **after** the miracle—not before, in order to receive a miracle! The New Testament teaches the very opposite of those who claim that miracles occur today. They say a person must have faith **before** he or she can receive a miracle. The New Testament teaches that miracles were performed to authenticate the divine origin of the speaker’s message and/or identity. The message, in turn, generated faith in the hearer (cf. Romans 10:17). Hence, **miracles preceded faith**. Even tongue-speaking was designed to convince the **unbeliever** to give heed to the message (1 Corinthians 14:22).

## What About Elders?

Some have suggested that James 5:14-15 indicates that elders can heal people today. But James refers to the first century phenomenon of supernatural healing that is mentioned as one of the gifts available to the first century church (1 Corinthians 12:9,30; see also Mark 6:13). Yet, as demonstrated above, all such miraculous gifts have ceased. Elders in the first century churches would have acquired the ability to heal by receiving the laying on of the apostles' hands. The olive oil, though used medicinally in the first century, was merely a symbol of Christ’s power to heal, which the elders would have applied to the sick person as they prayed for God to heal the individual. The miraculous healing was not imparted by either the oil or the elders' hands, but by “the prayer of faith” (vs. 15). Such miraculous intervention on God's part would have been immediate with complete and full recovery. Those who believe these verses apply today are inevitably stymied when the sick individual is not instantaneously healed, and then must resort to excuses and unscriptural explanations. It is obvious from the text that the illness referred to is a **life-threatening one**, since “save” in verse 15 refers, not to spiritual salvation, but to physical salvation, i.e., he will be made well (cf. “the Lord will raise him up”). When they bring elders to pray over a person who has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, does he recover? What if the elders pray over and anoint a person who lost his hand or arm in an accident? Will his arm be restored? Again, the desire to have miraculous healing in the church today fails completely to grasp why healing occurred in Bible times: not merely to make people well, but to spotlight the validity of God’s Word as conveyed by His emissaries.

## SUMMARY

A good summary passage that pinpoints precisely the purpose of miracles throughout the Bible is seen in the incident concerning the widow of Zarephath to whom Elijah was sent for assistance in surviving the famine during the reign of King Ahab. When her son’s serious

illness culminated in his death, Elijah brought the boy back to life, raising him from the dead. Her subsequent verbal observation summarizes succinctly the function of the miraculous: “Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth” (1 Kings 17:24). The miracle fulfilled its intended purpose: to verify that, as a genuine emissary of the one true God, Elijah was a communicator of God’s Word. The restoration of the life of her son—though magnificent and thrilling in itself—was secondary to the verified realization that Elijah was a legitimate communicator of the Word of the one true God.

## THE DURATION OF MIRACLES

These observations bring us to a third extremely critical realization: once God revealed the entirety of the information that He wished to make available to mankind (later contained in what we call the New Testament), the need for miraculous confirmation of the oral Word came to an end. Now, people can sit down with a New Testament, the written Word of God, and, with honest and diligent study, conclude that it is God’s Word. Many preachers and teachers today have failed to acknowledge this crucial biblical factor. They fail to face the fact that we have absolutely no need for the miraculous. Since the purpose of miracles has been achieved, the miracles, themselves, have ceased. I repeat: the Bible teaches that miracles are no longer necessary. We have everything we need to function in this life, to be pleasing to God, and to survive spiritually (2 Peter 1:3). Spiritual maturity is now within the grasp of every single individual who chooses to access the means to maturity—the written Word of God. To insist that we have need for the miraculous today is to undermine, and to cast aspersions upon, the all-sufficiency of God’s Word (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

The most detailed treatment of the phenomena of miracles in the New Testament, including tongue-speaking, healing, and prophecy, is 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. These three chapters were written to Christians at Corinth because miracles were being abused and misused. Chapter 12 defines the miracles. Chapter 13 indicates their duration. Chapter 14 explains their disposition. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul argued that the body (the church) should function harmoniously by using miraculous gifts properly. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul argued that love is a more excellent attribute than miraculous gifts. After all, miraculous gifts (i.e., prophecy, tongue-speaking, supernatural knowledge, etc.) were going to fail, cease, vanish, and be done away (13:8). These miraculous gifts are identified in the text with the expression “in part” (13:9-10). The “in part,” or miraculous, would cease and be done away when the “perfect” had come. But to what does the “perfect” refer?

The Greek word translated “perfect” is *teleios*. The term does not refer to “perfect” in the sense typically understood by the average modern English reader, i.e., to be sinless. Following this faulty notion, some have concluded that the “perfect” refers to Jesus—since He has been the only perfect person. Other interpretations apply “perfect” to heaven (the only perfect place that will be free of sin and imperfection), or Christian maturity and perfect love (the perfect condition or quality). But, in context, Paul was not contrasting qualities or places. He was contrasting quantities, i.e., those things that were incomplete and partial (miraculous gifts) with that which would be total and complete (the fully revealed Word of God). The inaccuracy of these interpretations is seen further in the Greek definition of *teleios*. The word refers to totality, that which is whole, brought to its end, finished, and lacking nothing necessary to completeness (Delling, 1972, 8:73; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 816; Thayer, 1901, p. 618). When referring to persons, *teleios* refers to being full-grown, adult, and mature (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 817; Thayer, 1977, p. 618). Used in its neuter form, Paul was referring to a thing—not a person—something that, when completed or finished, would replace the incomplete or partial, i.e., the miraculous gifts—which clearly had only temporary significance. Commenting on the abolition of the miraculous gifts of

prophecy and supernatural knowledge (mentioned in vss. 8 and 9), W.R. Nicoll observed that “these charisms are **partial** in scope, and therefore temporary: the **fragmentary** gives place to the **complete**” (1900, 2:900, emp. added). Kenneth Wuest agreed: “In I Corinthians 13:10, the word means ‘complete,’ and is contrasted to that which is incomplete” (1943a, pp. 117-118). Whereas James used the term *teleios* to refer to the all-sufficiency of God’s Word in its ability to achieve everything it was intended to do (James 1:25), the exegete is forced to conclude that Paul’s use of “perfect” referred to the completed revelation or totally revealed New Testament Scriptures. The revelation of God’s will was completed in its entirety when the final book of the New Testament, Revelation, was written by John prior to A.D. 100.

Paul offered a useful illustration to clarify his point. When the church possessed only bits and pieces of God’s will, as revealed through scattered miraculous gifts and the gradual production, between approximately A.D. 57 and A.D. 95, of the written documents from the inspired writers of the New Testament, it could not achieve full spiritual maturity. It therefore was like a child (13:11). It lacked the necessary constituent elements to reach spiritual adulthood. However, when the totality of God’s will, which became the New Testament, had been revealed, the church then had the means available to become “a man” (13:11). Once the church had access to all of God’s written Word, the means by which the Word was given (i.e., miraculous gifts) would be obsolete, useless, and therefore “put away” (13:11). Notice that in this illustration, Paul likened miracles to “childish things” (13:11). In other words, miracles were the spiritual equivalents of pacifiers that were necessary while the church was in a state of infancy. Now that the church has access to “all truth” (John 16:13), the use of tongue-speaking and other miraculous enhancements in the church today would be comparable to an adult man or woman sucking on a pacifier!

Paul then explained his point by making a contrast between the initial necessity of miracles to reveal and confirm God’s Word, and the idea of looking through a clouded mirror (see Workman, 1983, p. 8). Once the entire contents of the New Testament had been revealed, the miraculous gifts no longer would be necessary. Having all of God’s revealed Word would enable one to be face to face with that Word rather than “looking through a clouded mirror,” i.e., having partial access. Paul wrote (13:11): “Now I know in part [i.e., my knowledge of God’s revelation is incomplete and partial due to limited access via the miraculous element—DM], but then [i.e., when all of God’s Word is revealed—DM] shall I know fully even as also I was fully known [i.e., I shall be made to know or taught thoroughly (which is the figure of speech known as heterosis of the verb in which the intransitive is put for the transitive—see Bullinger, 1898, p. 512)—DM].”

Paul made essentially the same point to the Ephesians that he made to the Corinthians. Miracles—the “gifts” given by Christ (Ephesians 4:8)—were to last “**till** the unity of **the** faith and **the** knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:13, emp. added). Two significant observations emerge from this latter verse. First, the word translated “till” (Middle English for “until”) is *mechri*, and was used as a conjunction to indicate the *terminus ad quem* [finishing point] of the miraculous offices (mentioned in vs. 11) bestowed as gifts by Christ. [For treatments of the use of *mechri* in this verse, see Thayer, 1977, p. 408; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 517; Moulton and Milligan, 1982, p. 407; Blass, et al., 1961, pp. 193-194; Robertson, 1934, pp. 974-975; Dana and Mantey, 1927, p. 281; see also the use of the term in Mark 13:30 and Galatians 4:19]. Nicoll observed: “The statement of the great object of Christ’s gifts and the provision made by Him for its fulfillment is now followed by a statement of the **time** this provision and the consequent service are to last” (1900, 3:332, emp. in orig.). Paul was “[s]pecifying the **time** up to which this ministry and impartation of gifts are to last” (Vincent, 1890, p. 390, emp. added).

Second, the phrase “the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” often is misunderstood to refer to the eventual **unifying** of all believers in Christ. But this conclusion

cannot be correct. Both Scripture and common sense dispel such a notion. Complete unity within Christendom will never occur. Those who profess affiliation with Christianity are in a hopeless state of disunity. Catholicism and Protestant denominationalism are fractured into a plethora of factions and splinter groups—literally thousands of divisions and disagreements. Besides, Protestant denominationalism did not exist in the New Testament era, and the New Testament neither countenances nor legitimizes any such “manifestation” of Christianity. Nor will unity ever be achieved even within churches of Christ. The first-century congregations did not attain complete internal unity. Nor have the post first-century congregations achieved unity within.

In contrast with this interpretation, notice the use of the articles in the phrases: “**the** faith” and “**the** knowledge.” Contextually, Paul was referring to **the system of faith** alluded to so often in the New Testament. Jude urged his readers to “contend earnestly for **the** faith” (Jude 3). Paul referred to himself when he quoted others as saying, “He that once persecuted us now preacheth **the** faith of which he once made havoc” (Galatians 1:23). Luke reported that “a great company of the priests were obedient to **the** faith” (Acts 6:7). Elymas sought to “turn aside the proconsul from **the** faith” (Acts 13:8). The early disciples were exhorted to “continue in **the** faith” (Acts 14:22). Due to Paul’s repeat visits in Lycaonia, “the churches were strengthened in **the** faith” (Acts 16:5).

So “the faith” and “the knowledge” refer to the **completed body of information** that constitutes the Christian religion. Indeed, eight verses earlier (Ephesians 4:5), Paul already had referred to “the faith” as the summation and totality of Christian doctrine—now situated in the repository of the New Testament. An honest exegete is driven to conclude that once the precepts of New Testament Christianity were revealed on Earth, the miraculous element no longer was necessary. Miracles lasted until “the faith” was completely revealed. They had served their purpose, in the same way that scaffolding is useful while a building is under construction. However, once construction is complete, the scaffolding is removed and discarded as unnecessary and superfluous paraphernalia.

| <b>THE TEMPORARY NATURE OF MIRACLES<br/>IN CORINTH AND EPHEBUS</b> |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1 Corinthians 12-14</b>   | <b>Ephesians 4</b>   |
| “Gifts” (12:4,9, 28,30,31)   | “Gifts” (4:7-8)  |
| “no schism in the body” (12:25)                                    | “joined and knit together” (4:16)                            |
| “one body, many members” (12:12,14,18-20,27)                       | “whole body, every part” (4:16)                              |
| “apostles, prophets, teachers” (12:29)                             | “apostles, prophets, pastor-teachers” (4:11)                 |
| “prophecies, knowledge” (13:8)                                     | “prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers” (4:11)              |
| “fail, cease, vanish, done away” (13:8-10)                         | “until” (4:13)<br>“we come to the unity of the faith” (4:13) |
| “when perfect comes” (13:10)                                       | “the knowledge/the fullness of Christ” (4:13)                |
| “shall know” (13:12)   | “the knowledge/the fullness of Christ” (4:13)                |
| “child” (13:11)  | “children” (4:14)  |
| “man” (13:11)  | “man” (4:13)   |
| “put away childish things” (13:11)                                 | “grow up” (4:15)   |
| “love” (13:1-8)  | “love” (4:15-16)   |
| “edification of the church” (14:3-5,12,17)                         | “edifying the body of Christ” (4:12)                         |

## THE DISPLAY AND DISPOSITION OF MIRACLES

Fourth, the actual exercise of miraculous gifts by Christians is addressed in 1 Corinthians 14. In this context, Paul used the term “gifts” (*charismata*, from *charisma*) in a technical sense (like *pneumatika*) to refer to miraculous abilities, designated by Thayer “**extraordinary** powers...by the Holy Spirit” (1901, p. 667, emp. added; cf. Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 887). Hans Conzelmann stated that the term indicated that “[t]he operations are **supernatural**” and of “**supernatural** potency” (1974, 9:405, emp. added). [The word is so used in the Pauline corpus in 10 of its 16 occurrences (Romans 1:11; 12:6; 1 Corinthians 1:7; 12:4,9,28,30,31; 1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). The only other occurrence of the word in the New Testament was Peter’s comparable use, i.e., to refer to supernatural ability (1 Peter 4:10)—see Moulton, et al., 1978, p. 1005]. In the Corinthian context of chapter 14, special attention was given by Paul to two of the miraculous gifts in particular: prophecy and tongue-speaking. Several relevant points occur with regard to the gift of tongue-speaking that help one to understand both the temporary nature of miracles as well as their irrelevance to a contemporary pursuit and practice of New Testament Christianity.

### Tongue-Speaking

First, in 1 Corinthians 14, the term “unknown” (in regard to tongues) was italicized in the KJV because it does not appear in the original Greek text (14:2,4,13-14,19,27). By

inserting this word into their translation, the translators were attempting to aid the English reader. They undoubtedly were hoping to convey the idea that the languages to which Paul referred were **unknown** to the speaker, i.e., the speaker had no prior training by which to learn or know the language. He spoke the language strictly by God's miraculous empowerment. "Unknown" certainly was not intended to convey the idea that the tongues were unknown **to all humans** and, as such, were non-earthly, non-human languages.

Second, the events reported at the very beginning of the Christian religion (Acts 2) set the precedent for understanding that tongue-speaking entailed no more than the ability to speak a foreign human language (which the speaker had not studied) to people from a variety of geographical locales (e.g., Parthians, Medes, Arabians—Acts 2:9-11). The unbiased Bible student must conclude that what is described in detail in Acts 2 is the same phenomenon alluded to in 1 Corinthians 14. All tongue-speaking in the Bible consisted of known human languages (ideally known to the very audience being addressed) that were unknown (i.e., unstudied, unlearned) by the one who was speaking the language.

Third, there is simply no such thing as an "ecstatic utterance" in the New Testament. The tongue-speaking of 1 Corinthians 14 entailed human language—not incoherent gibberish. A simple reading of the chapter demonstrates that known human languages are under consideration. For example, Paul paralleled tongue-speaking with the use of the trumpet in warfare. If the bugler sounded meaningless noise, the military would be thrown into confusion. It was imperative for the bugler to blow the proper notes and tones, i.e., meaningful musical "language," so that the army would understand what was being communicated (whether to charge, engage, or retreat). Sound without sense fails to achieve the very purpose of tongue-speaking. Paul then stated:

So likewise ye, unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages **in the world**, and no kind is without signification. If then I know not the meaning of the language, I shall be to him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh will be a barbarian unto me (1 Corinthians 14:9-11, emp. added).

Obviously, Paul was referring to human languages—those that exist "in the world." He envisioned a scenario where two individuals, who spoke different languages, are attempting to communicate with each other. If one speaks in Spanish and the other in German, as they attempt to speak to one another, each would be a "foreigner" to the other. Neither would understand what the other was attempting to say. Hence the need for tongue-speaking, i.e., the ability to speak human language unknown to the speaker but known to the recipient.

Later in the chapter, Paul quoted Isaiah 28:11-12 where God threatened the Israelites with the fact that their failure to listen to Him (by means of the words spoken by His prophets) meant that He soon would be communicating to them through the language of their Assyrian conquerors—conquerors whom God would send against them. This powerful illustration presupposes the fact that in both Isaiah and 1 Corinthians, human languages are under consideration. After quoting Isaiah, Paul drew the conclusion that tongue-speaking was intended by God to be directed to **unbelievers**. Why? Because it would prove to the unbeliever that the tongue-speaker, who did not possess the natural ability to speak that language, was being empowered by God to speak in the language spoken by the unbeliever. The unbeliever would recognize the divine origin of the tongue-speaker's ability, and thereby be willing to consider the words being spoken as the instructions of God. Again, an examination of 1 Corinthians 14 yields the result that no contextual justification exists for drawing the conclusion that the Bible refers to, let alone endorses, the notion of "**ecstatic**" speech.

## Tongues of Angels?

But what about Paul's passing reference to the "tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13:1? Would not this reference prove that tongue-speaking could involve languages beyond those spoken by humans? In the first place, consider the role, purpose, and activity of angels described in the Bible. The word "angel" (Greek—*angelos*; Hebrew—*malak*) simply means "messenger"—one who "speaks and acts in the place of the one who has sent him" (Bietenhard, 1975, 1:101; Botterweck, et al., 1997, 8:308; Grundmann, 1964, 1:74ff; Gesenius, 1847, p. 475; Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 7). It does not mean merely "to send," but rather "to send a messenger/message" (Ringgren, 1997, 8:310). It is true that angels in both the Old and New Testaments carried out a wide range of activities beyond message-bearing, including: worshipping God (Revelation 5:11-12); comforting, aiding, and protecting (Daniel 6:22; Matthew 4:11; Luke 22:43; Acts 5:19; Hebrews 1:14); and executing judgment and inflicting punishment and death (e.g., Matthew 13:49; Acts 12:23). But it still remains true to say that the meaning of the term "angel" is a messenger—one who communicates a spoken message. Therefore, their principal role in God's scheme of things was to function as messengers to humans (Grundmann, 1964, 1:74). Consequently, angels always are represented in Scripture as communicating in human language.

In the second place, what logical reason exists for humans to speak in an alleged "angelic" language that is different from human language? What would be the spiritual benefit? The Bible certainly makes no provision for humans to communicate with angels in such a language, nor would there be any need for an angel to communicate to a human in a non-earthly language. The whole point of 1 Corinthians 12-13 was to stress the need to function in the church in ways that were meaningful and understandable. Since God, by His very nature, never would do anything that is superfluous, unnecessary, or frivolous, it follows that He would not bestow upon a human being the ability to speak in a non-human language. The ability would serve no purpose! The Bible simply offers no rationale nor justification for identifying the "tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13:1 with some heavenly, otherworldly, non-earthly languages.

In the third place, if, in fact, the "tongues of angels" refers to known human languages, what was Paul's point? Since angels were God's appointed spokesmen, they naturally would perform their assignment in such a way that God would be represented as He would want to be. God's own angelic emissaries would have complied with their responsibility in such a way and manner that they would have God's approval. In other words, angels would naturally articulate God's message as well as it could be expressed (i.e., perfectly). When God inspired mere humans to communicate His will, He integrated their own educational background, stylistic idiosyncrasies, and vocabulary into their oral and literary productions. No such need would have existed for angels. Their communications would have been unfiltered through human agency. Their announcements would have been the epitome and pinnacle of eloquence and oratorical skill.

Perhaps, then, Paul was not drawing a contrast between human and nonhuman languages at all. Before referring to the "tongues of angels," he referred to "the tongues of men." Why would Paul say, "Though I speak with the tongues of men"? After all, isn't that precisely what all adult humans do? We humans speak at least one human language! Paul must have been referring, then, not to the ability to speak a human language, but to the ability to speak **all** human languages. No tongue-speaker in the first-century church had the ability to speak all human languages. In fact, the textual evidence indicates that most tongue-speakers probably had the ability to speak only one human language—which he, himself, did not understand—thus necessitating the need for an inspired interpreter (1 Corinthians 12:30; 14:26-28). Paul could apparently speak more languages than any of the others (1 Corinthians

14:18). If the “tongues of men” referred to the number of human languages (rather than referring to the ability to speak a human language), then the “tongues of angels” would refer—not to the ability to speak an angelic language—but to the ability to speak human languages **the way angels do**.

Here, then, would have been Paul’s point: even if a tongue-speaker could speak every human language known to man, and even if that tongue-speaker could speak those human languages with the efficiency, skill, and perfection that God’s angelic messengers have spoken them in history, without love, the ability would be wasted. With this understanding of the text, Paul was not contrasting human with nonhuman language. He was encompassing both the quantity (if I could speak all human languages) and the quality (if I could speak them perfectly) of speaking human language.

One final point on the matter of the “tongues of angels” merits mention. Even if the expression actually refers to angelic tongues that are nonhuman, it still is likely that tongue-speakers were incapable of speaking such languages. Why? Paul was speaking hypothetically and hyperbolically. No human being (with the exception of perhaps Jesus) has ever been able to speak in all human languages. For Paul to suggest such was to pose a hypothetical situation. It was to exaggerate the facts. So Paul’s meaning was: “even if I were capable of speaking all human languages—which I’m not.” Likewise, no human being has ever been able to speak the tongues of angels. So Paul’s meaning was: “even if I were capable of speaking the languages of angels—which I’m not.” This conclusion is supported further by the verse that follows the reference to the “tongues of angels.” There, Paul used two additional hypothetical events when he said, “if I...know all mysteries and all knowledge” and “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains” (1 Corinthians 13:2). But no one on the planet (with the exception of deity) has understood all mysteries and all knowledge, nor has had faith that could literally remove mountains. Again, Paul was merely saying, “even if I could do such things—which I can’t.”

Fourth, Paul stated very clearly that tongue-speaking was a sign to **unbelievers**—not believers (14:22). Tongue-speaking was to be done in **their** presence, to convince **them** of the truth being spoken, i.e., to confirm the Word. The tongue-speaking being practiced today is done in the presence of those who **already believe** that tongue-speaking is occurring and, when an unbeliever, who is skeptical of the genuineness of the activity, makes an appearance in such an assembly, the claim often is made that tongue-speaking cannot occur because of the presence of unbelief. Once again, the New Testament teaches the very opposite of those who claim the ability to speak in tongues today.

Fifth, the recipient of a miraculous gift in the New Testament could control himself (14:32). He was not overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit so that he began to babble or flail about. Tongue-speaking today is frequently practiced in a setting where the individuals who claim to be exercising the gift are speaking uncontrollably at the very time that others are either doing the same thing or engaging in some other action. This overlapping activity is in direct violation of three of Paul’s commands: (1) that each individual take their turn one at a time; (2) that no more than three tongue-speakers speak per service; and (3) that tongue-speakers remain silent if no interpreter is present (14:27-28).

The claim by many today to be able to speak in tongues is simply out of harmony with New Testament teaching. Anyone can babble, make up sounds, and claim he or she is speaking in tongues. But such conduct is no **sign** today. It is precisely the same phenomenon that pagan religions have practiced through the centuries. In the New Testament, however, no one questioned the authenticity of tongue-speaking. Why? The speaker was speaking a known human language that could be understood by those present who knew that language and knew that that particular speaker did not know that language beforehand. As McGarvey



observed about Acts 2: “Not only did the apostles speak in foreign languages that were understood by the hearers, some understanding one and some another, but the fact that this was done by Galileans, who knew only their mother tongue, was the one significant fact that gave to Peter’s speech which followed all of its power over the multitude” (1910, p. 318). If and when self-proclaimed tongue-speakers today demonstrate that genuine New Testament gift, their message could be accepted as being from God. But no one today has demonstrated that genuine New Testament gift.

## Holy Spirit Baptism

Where does the baptism of the Holy Spirit fit into this discussion? Today’s alleged practitioners typically associate the expression “Holy Spirit baptism” with the phenomenon that enables the believer to speak in tongues, heal someone, or work other miracles. In other words, Holy Spirit baptism is simply a generic reference to miraculous empowerment. Anyone who can speak in a tongue or perform any other miraculous action is said to have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. He is said to be “Spirit-filled.” However, it might surprise the reader to find that the Bible alludes to Holy Spirit baptism in a very narrow, specialized, even technical sense. Just because a person could speak in tongues or work miracles did not necessarily mean he had been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

The very first allusion to Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament is John’s statement: “I indeed baptize you in water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me...will **baptize you in the Holy Spirit**” (Matthew 3:11, emp. added). From this statement alone, one might be tempted to assume that Christians **in general** would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. But this assumption would be a premature conclusion. John was not addressing a Christian audience. He was speaking to Jews. Nothing in the context allows the interpreter to distinguish John’s intended recipients of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism—whether all humans, all Jews, all Christians, or merely some of those in one or more of these categories. Likewise, the exact recipients of the baptism of fire (i.e., hell) are not specified. However, as is often the case in the Bible, the specific recipients of this promise are clarified in later passages.

Just before His ascension, Jesus told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). In John chapters 14-16, Jesus made several specific promises to the apostles concerning the coming of the Spirit—the “Comforter” or “Helper” (*parakletos*)—upon them, to empower them to do the peculiar work of an apostle (i.e., to recall the words Jesus had spoken to them, to speak and write by inspiration, and to launch the Christian religion). If these verses apply to all Christians, then all Christians ought to have been personally guided “into all the truth” (John 16:13), and thus would have absolutely no need of written Scripture (John 14:26). However, in context, these verses clearly refer to **the apostolic office**.

Jesus further clarified the application of Holy Spirit baptism when He told the apostles that the earlier statement made in Luke 24:49 applied to **them**, and would come to pass “not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5). Jesus also stated that the “power” that they would receive would be from the Holy Spirit, which would enable them to witness to the world what they had experienced by being with Jesus (Acts 1:8). Notice very carefully that on this occasion Jesus made an explicit reference to the very statement that John had uttered previously in Matthew 3: “for John indeed baptized with water; but **ye** [apostles—DM] shall be **baptized in the Holy Spirit** not many days hence” (Acts 1:5, emp. added). Jesus specifically and explicitly identified the Holy Spirit baptism that He would administer (in keeping with John’s prediction) would take place within a few days, and would be confined to the apostles.

All one need do is turn the page to see the promise of Holy Spirit baptism achieve dramatic and climactic fulfillment in Acts 2 when the Spirit was poured out only upon the apostles. The antecedent of “they” in Acts 2:4 is “the apostles” in Acts 1:26. The apostles were the ones who spoke in tongues and taught the people. **They** were the recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as is evident from the following contextual indicators: (1) “are not all these that speak **Galileans?**” (2:7); (2) “Peter, standing up with **the eleven**” (2:14); (3) “they...said unto Peter and the rest of **the apostles**” (2:37); (4) Peter quoted Joel 2:28-32 and applied it to that occasion as proof that **the apostles** were not intoxicated; and (5) the text even states explicitly that the signs and wonders were “done through **the apostles**” (2:43). This pattern continues in the book of Acts: “And by the hands of **the apostles** were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (5:12); “the Lord, who bare witness unto the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by **their hands**” (14:3); “what signs and wonders God had wrought...through **them**” (15:12).

The next direct reference to Holy Spirit baptism consisted of Peter describing the experience of the Gentiles in Acts 10. Referring to their empowerment to speak in tongues, Peter explicitly identified it as being comparable to the experience of the apostles in Acts 2. Note his explanation: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, even as on **us** [apostles—DM] at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit. If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto **us** [apostles—DM]...” (Acts 11:15-17, emp. added). Peter unmistakably linked the baptism of the Holy Spirit predicted by John in Matthew 3:11, and applied by Jesus to the apostles in Acts 1:5, with the unique and exclusive bestowal of the same on the first Gentile candidates of salvation. If the baptism of the Holy Spirit had occurred between Acts 2 and Acts 10, why did Peter compare the Gentiles’ experience with the experience of the **apostles**—rather than comparing it with many other Christians who allegedly would have received it during the intervening years? The answer lies in the fact that the baptism of the Holy Spirit did not occur during the intervening years. Baptism of the Holy Spirit was a unique and infrequent occurrence that came directly from deity.

This understanding harmonizes with additional facts. The great prophecy of the Old Testament, which made special reference to the coming New Testament era as the dispensation of the Spirit, incorporated a most noteworthy expression. God declared, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Joel 2:28). Peter repeated it on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). What did God mean by the expression “**all flesh**”? Members of the charismatic community insist that “all flesh” means “all **Christians**.” They maintain that every Christian can receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit. They claim that to narrow the application of the promise of Holy Spirit baptism to a select group of individuals would deprive all other Christians of the opportunity to receive miraculous power. However, upon what **biblical** basis may such a claim be made?

Those who claim the presence of miraculous gifts are guilty of the very thing they condemn—narrowing the expression “all flesh.” Surely no one would take the position that it means all **animal** flesh—since animals are not the recipients of God’s spiritual provisions. Nor would anyone contend that it means all **human** flesh—since all wicked, disobedient, unbelieving people would hardly expect, let alone desire, to receive God’s Spirit. Those who agree that the expression “all flesh” must undoubtedly be qualified to exclude the animals and the unbelieving will nonetheless insist that narrowing the meaning to less than “all Christians” is unjustifiable.

To understand the proper meaning and application of the expression “all flesh,” one must examine the **biblical** use of the expression. “All flesh” often is used in the Bible to refer to the bulk of humanity (e.g., Genesis 6:12-13). It also can include all animal flesh (e.g., Genesis

6:17,19). However, with God's special utilization of the descendants of Abraham in His scheme of redemption, "all flesh" often has the more technical meaning of "all **nationalities**." The primary reason for this specialized use of the expression was due to the fact that most of the Old Testament was written against the backdrop of the presence of the nation of Israel. God is certainly "no respecter of persons" (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17; Acts 10:34-35). He does not favor one ethnic group over another. However, since His redemptive intention included bringing Jesus into the world for the benefit of all, someone had to be selected through whom Jesus' arrival might be achieved. That man was Abraham (Galatians 3:8,16) and, consequently, his descendents.

As a result of this circumstance, the Jewish writers of the Bible frequently divided humanity into **only two** racial groupings, i.e., Jew and non-Jew (Gentile). For example, in what is obviously a strongly Messianic passage, Isaiah (the "Messianic prophet") predicted the coming of John the baptizer who would prepare the way for Jesus. He exclaimed: "The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together" (40:5). The reference to "all flesh" was an unmistakable reference to the availability of salvation to both Jew and Gentile in the Christian era, as evinced by Luke's quotation of the passage (Luke 3:6). The same is true in another prophecy that Isaiah uttered pertaining to the coming Christian era: "All flesh shall come to worship before Me" (Isaiah 66:23). The Jews of Isaiah's day would not have been very pleased with Isaiah's declarations, since they most certainly would have understood him to be predicting the incorporation of Gentiles into God's favor—which the Jews felt they alone enjoyed.

Paul cinched the meaning of "all flesh" in his premiere treatise on justification by faith. He drew a clear distinction between the two ethnic categories by first declaring the sins of the Gentiles (Romans 1:18-32) and then declaring the sins of the Jews (Romans 2:1-3:8). Notice carefully his concluding remarks as he brought the first section of the book to its climax: "What then? are **we** [the Jews—DM] better than **they** [the Gentiles—DM]? No, in no wise: for we before laid to the charge **both** of Jews and Greeks, that they are **all** under sin" (Romans 3:9, emp. added). He then quoted a series of Old Testament verses, which verified his emphasis upon the two (and only two) categories of human flesh, using two significant terms: "none" and "all." "None" means neither Jew nor Gentile. "All" means both Jew and Gentile. Then he articulated his grand and climactic conclusion: "because by the works of the law shall **no flesh** be justified" (Romans 3:20, emp. added). "No flesh" referred to Jew and Gentile. In other words, neither Jew nor Gentile could be justified by law alone. "No flesh" and "all flesh" were technical allusions to the two **categories** of human flesh, i.e., Jew and non-Jew (cf. John 17:2).

Observe, then, that the first recipients of Holy Spirit baptism, as we have seen, were the **Jewish** apostles on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. It equipped them to establish the church and to write, speak, and confirm inspired truth. The second recipients of Holy Spirit baptism were the **Gentile** members of the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. It convinced Jewish Christians that Gentiles were fit prospects for the reception of the Gospel, and valid candidates for entrance into the kingdom (Acts 10:34-35,45; 11:18). So Joel's statement, that God would pour out His Spirit on "all flesh," applied to the outpouring on **Jews** in Acts 2 and on **Gentiles** in Acts 10. The only other conceivable occurrence of Holy Spirit baptism would have been Paul, who would have received direct miraculous ability from God as well. His reception was obviously unique because (1) he was not an apostle when the Twelve received the Spirit, and (2) he was "one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:8). Holy Spirit baptism, then, filled two unique and exclusive purposes: (1) to prepare the apostles for their apostolic (not Christian) roles, and (2) to provide divine demonstration that Gentiles were to be allowed to become Christians.

One additional consideration deserves comment regarding Joel's prophecy. If "all flesh" referred exclusively to the Jewish apostles and the first Gentile converts, why did Joel include "sons, daughters, old men, young men, servants, and handmaids" in the reception of God's Spirit (Joel 2:28-29)? As was typical of Hebrew prophecy, progressive, sequential, and complete fulfillment would be forthcoming. A prophecy could possess several features that found fulfillment in a variety of circumstances. It is apparent, on the basis of the references already discussed (e.g., Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:15-17), that only the **first part** of Joel's prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The "last days" (Acts 2:17) referred to the **entire** Christian dispensation from Pentecost to the Judgment. The outpouring of the Spirit, therefore, would include more than just the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was confined to the Jewish apostles on Pentecost and the Gentiles a few years later. Though the peculiar phenomenon of Holy Spirit baptism was limited to those two specific ethnic groups (i.e., the twelve apostles and the household of Cornelius), **additional** activity of the Spirit would include the impartation of miraculous gifts through the laying on of the apostles' hands (discussed below). This conclusion is evident from the fact that no "**daughters**" or "**handmaids**" received Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost. Nor is there any evidence of the occurrence of "**dreams**" or "**visions**" on Pentecost. With the Holy Spirit's expanded presence in the instigation of Christianity in the first century came the eventual impartation of miraculous ability separate and apart from Holy Spirit baptism. The broadened fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (subsequent to Acts 2) is seen in the references to Philip's **daughters** who prophesied (Acts 21:9) and in the occurrence of **visions** (Acts 9:10; 10:3,10; 16:9). However, these miraculous manifestations, though included in Joel's prophecy, were not instances of Holy Spirit baptism. The common link in the Holy Spirit's outpouring on Pentecost and the manifestations of the Spirit thereafter was the baptism of the Holy Spirit on **the apostles**—who were the keys to the further distribution of miraculous power in the early years of Christianity.

## 1 Corinthians 12:13

But what about Paul's statement to the Corinthians? He wrote: "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body...and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Some have insisted that this verse teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is imparted to **all Christians**. Careful analysis of the verse, however, demonstrates that Paul was not referring to the baptism of the Holy Spirit that was received only twice in the New Testament (if you omit Paul). If the Corinthians had been baptized in the Holy Spirit, Paul likely would have worded the verse: "We were all baptized in one Spirit into one body." This wording would have made it plain that their baptism was Holy Spirit baptism. However, Paul connected "baptized" with "into one body," and placed "in one Spirit" **before** both "baptized" and "into one body." Did he mean to say that their baptism entailed being indwelt with the Spirit, or having the Spirit overwhelm (i.e., immerse) them, or come upon them, i.e., that the Holy Spirit, **Himself**, was what the Corinthians had received or been baptized in?

The grammar of the passage provides a decisive and definitive answer. The word "Spirit" is in the instrumental case in Greek, indicating personal agency. The personal agent in the passage who did the baptizing is the Holy Spirit. His baptizing resulted in the placement of the individuals into the one body of Christ. The verb is aorist, showing that Paul was referring to a once-for-all act in the past. Wuest explained: "It is not the baptism **with** the Spirit or **of** the Spirit, in the sense that the Holy Spirit is the element which is applied to us. It is the baptism **by** the Spirit. This baptism does not bring the Spirit to us in the sense that God places the Spirit **upon** or **in** us. Rather, this baptism brings the believer into vital union with Jesus Christ" (1943b, p. 86, emp. added). The Corinthians were the beneficiaries—not of the Spirit—but of the Spirit's guidance or assistance. They were baptized **by** the Spirit (cf. KJV, NKJV, NASV, RSV, NIV).

Further grammatical evidence in the context supports this conclusion. Earlier in the chapter, Paul said that no person could say that Jesus is Lord “but in the Holy Spirit” (vs. 3). A person could say Jesus is Lord without being **in** the Spirit or having the Holy Spirit **in** or **on** him. But a person could not say Jesus is Lord if the Holy Spirit had not revealed such information about Jesus—as He did by empowering the apostles to produce written revelation. A few verses later, Paul pinpointed several gifts that were given “through the Spirit,” “according to the same Spirit,” and “in the same Spirit” (vss. 8-9, ASV). All three phrases are equivalent, and refer to the Holy Spirit’s **action**, not the **state of being** in the Holy Spirit. Paul’s summary of the section verifies that this meaning is intended: “But one and the same Spirit **works** all these things, **distributing to** each one individually as He wills” (vs. 11).

In view of these contextual details, one is forced to conclude that in verse 13, Paul could be referring to no other baptism than the baptism enjoined by Christ in the Great Commission, i.e., the “one baptism” of Ephesians 4:5, the baptism which Paul, himself, administered to the Corinthians (Acts 18:8)—**water** baptism. The Holy Spirit was the agent through Whom Christ enjoined water baptism by means of the preached message. When a person complies with the instruction to be baptized in water, that person is baptized into the one body of Christ. Other verses in the New Testament confirm this understanding. Jesus announced: “[U]nless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Jesus meant what Paul meant, that when one obeys the teaching of the Spirit to be baptized in water, he is granted entrance into the kingdom. Paul reiterated this same teaching on two other occasions. To the Ephesian church, he pointed out that Jesus gave His life for the church “that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:26). He meant that an individual is permitted to be a part of the cleansed church of Christ when he submits to water baptism in accordance with the Holy Spirit’s inspired Word. Likewise, Paul told young Titus that Jesus “saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). Again, he meant that one is saved (and hence added to the body) at the point of water immersion, in which spiritual renewal is extended by the Holy Spirit.

We are forced to conclude that 1 Corinthians 12:13 does not refer to Holy Spirit baptism (see also McGarvey, 1910, pp. 254-256, and Reese, 1976, p. 76). The two instances of Holy Spirit baptism previously discussed (i.e., in Acts 2 and 10) stand unmistakably in stark contrast with the baptism alluded to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13. The Corinthian baptism placed the Corinthians into the body of Christ, i.e., at their conversion. But when the apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, they were **already** saved. When the household of Cornelius was baptized in the Holy Spirit, they were not yet saved and were inducted into the body of Christ only **after** Peter called for “water” (Acts 10:47-48).

## Laying on of Hands

If Acts 2 and Acts 10 are the only instances of Holy Spirit baptism in the New Testament, how then do we account for the fact that many others in the New Testament performed miracles or spoke in tongues? If they were not recipients of Holy Spirit baptism, how did they get the ability? The New Testament dictates only one other way to receive miraculous capability: through the laying on of the apostles’ hands. Only the apostles possessed the ability to transfer miraculous capability to others. This phenomenon is described succinctly by Luke:

Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that **through the laying on of the apostles’ hands** the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. But Peter said unto him, Thy silver perish with thee, because thou hast thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right before God” (Acts 8:17-21, emp. added).

This description establishes two important facts: (1) only the apostles had the ability to impart to others the ability to perform miracles; and (2) those other than the apostles who could perform miracles received their ability **indirectly** through the **apostles**—not **directly from God via Holy Spirit baptism**.

This fascinating feature of the existence of the miraculous in the first century makes it possible to understand how other individuals received their supernatural powers. For example, Philip, who was not an apostle, possessed the ability to perform miracles (Acts 8:6,13). If he was not an apostle, and he did not receive direct ability from God via baptism of the Holy Spirit, where, then, did he derive his ability? Luke informs us that Philip previously received the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 6:5-6). Likewise, the first Christians in Ephesus were enabled to speak in tongues when the apostle Paul laid his hands on them (Acts 19:6). Even Timothy received his gift from the laying on of Paul's hands (2 Timothy 1:6).

Some have challenged the exclusivity of the role of the apostles in their unique ability to impart the miraculous element by calling attention to the admonition given by Paul to Timothy: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands **of the presbytery**" (1 Timothy 4:14, emp. added). Even though Paul plainly declared that the "gift of God" which Timothy possessed was conferred "through the laying on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6), how does one explain the fact that Paul also stated that Timothy's gift came through the presbytery (i.e., the eldership) as well? Once again, the grammar of the text provides the answer. In 2 Timothy 1:6, where Paul claimed sole credit for imparting the gift to Timothy, he employed the Greek preposition *dia* with the genitive, which means "through" or "by means of" (Machen, 1923, p. 41; Dana and Mantey, 1927, p. 101). However, in 1 Timothy 4:14, where Paul included the eldership in the action of impartation, he employed a completely different Greek preposition—*meta*. The root meaning of *meta* is "in the midst of" (Dana and Mantey, p. 107). It denotes the **attendant circumstances** of something that takes place—the **accompanying** phenomena (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, pp. 510-511). It means "in association with" or "accompanied by" (Moule, 1959, p. 61; Thayer, 1901, p. 404; cf. Robertson, 1934, p. 611). In other words, Paul—as an apostle—imparted the miraculous gift to Timothy. It came from God through Paul. However, on that occasion, the local eldership of the church was present and participated with Paul in the event, lending their simultaneous support and accompanying commendation. After examining the grammatical data on the matter, Nicoll concluded: "[I]t was the imposition of hands by St. Paul that was the instrument used by God in the communication of the charisma to Timothy" (1900, 4:127; cf. Jamieson, et al., n.d., 2:414; Williams, 1960, p. 956). Consequently, 1 Timothy 4:14 provides no proof that miraculous capability could be received through other means in addition to apostolic imposition of hands and the two clear instances of Holy Spirit baptism.

## CONCLUSION

In light of all the biblical data set forth in this study, certain conclusions are quite evident. Since there are no apostles living today, and since Holy Spirit baptism was unique to the apostles (Acts 2) and the first Gentile converts (Acts 10), there is no Holy Spirit baptism today. Likewise, there is no miraculous healing today. There are no tongue-speakers today. The miraculous element in the Christian religion was terminated by God near the close of the first century. Once the last apostle died, the means by which miraculous capability was made available was dissolved. With the completion of God's revelation to humanity, now available in the Bible, people living today have all that is needed to be complete and to enjoy the fullness of Christian existence (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3; Ephesians 4:14).

The alleged miracles and tongue-speaking of today simply do not measure up to the Bible's description of the miraculous. They are unverifiable, ambiguous, and counterfeit. Today's "divine healing" consists of vague, unseen, non-quantifiable aches and pains like arthritis and headaches. But in the New Testament, people were raised from the dead—even days after death (e.g., John 11:17). Severed body parts were instantly restored (e.g., Luke 22:50-51). People who had been **born** blind had their sight restored (e.g., John 9:1). Those lame **from birth** were empowered to walk (Acts 3:2). First-century miracles were not limited only to certain ailments and psychosomatic illnesses that could be cured through natural means, or by mental adjustments on the part of the infirm. Jesus healed "**all** kinds of sickness and **all** kinds of disease" (Matthew 4:23, emp. added). No disease or sickness was exempt in the New Testament (cf. Acts 28:8-9). Where are these instances today? When has anyone restored a severed limb lost in an accident? When has a self-proclaimed "faith-healer" raised anyone from the dead? Where are the miracle workers who have healed the blind, the crippled, the paralyzed, and those whose infirmities have been documented as having been in existence for many years (John 5:3,5)? Where are the televangelists who will go to the children's hospitals and rectify birth defects and childhood diseases? Where are those who have ingested poison or been bitten by a venomous snake and remained unharmed (Mark 16:18; Acts 28:3-5)? An honest searcher for the truth is forced to conclude that the miraculous age has passed.

But human beings always are looking for something new, something exciting, and something flashy. They grasp for the attractive and the appealing, they want the easy way out, and they want something that makes them **feel** religious and secure—without having to face up to personal responsibilities. Hence, there will always be those who, instead of searching the Scriptures to find out whether these things are so (Acts 17:11), will simply disengage their minds, their spiritual sense, and their ability to assess "the words of truth and reason" (Acts 26:25).

Genuine Christianity today consists of simply taking the written Word of God, and studying it carefully in order to learn what God expects of us: simple meditation and reflection upon the Word of God—no brass bands or circus theatrics, no flash of light, or dream, or vision, no sudden rush attributable to the Holy Spirit. The pathway to heaven consists of honest, intensive investigation of written revelation, and a life of diligent self-discipline and self-denial that strives to incorporate spiritual attributes into one's life—attributes like patience, compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, honesty, integrity, peace of soul, joy, and clean, moral living. There are no short cuts to spirituality. **The miraculous is no answer.** Even in the first century, miracles were not designed to develop these spiritual attributes.

Certainly, God loves us and has promised to care for us (e.g., Matthew 6:33). But His workings in the Universe and in our lives are undertaken today providentially through the natural laws that He set into motion. After the first century, He has not—and will not—violate His own purposes by interfering with these laws in order to perform a miracle. In the final analysis, we are under obligation to seek His assistance by listening to the instructions found in His written Word. Only words from God, then and now, will equip us and prepare us for eternity. As Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the **words** of eternal life" (John 6:68, emp. added). Jesus said to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth: thy **word** is truth" (John 17:17, emp. added). When Satan attempted to prod Jesus into performing a miracle, Jesus said to him, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every **word** that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4, emp. added).

[NOTE: To listen to an audio sermon on this subject, [click here](#).]

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\$40 Million**



**Creflo Dollar – Net Worth  
\$27 Million**



**Benny Hinn – Net Worth  
\$42 Million**



**T.D. Jakes – Net Worth  
\$150 Million**



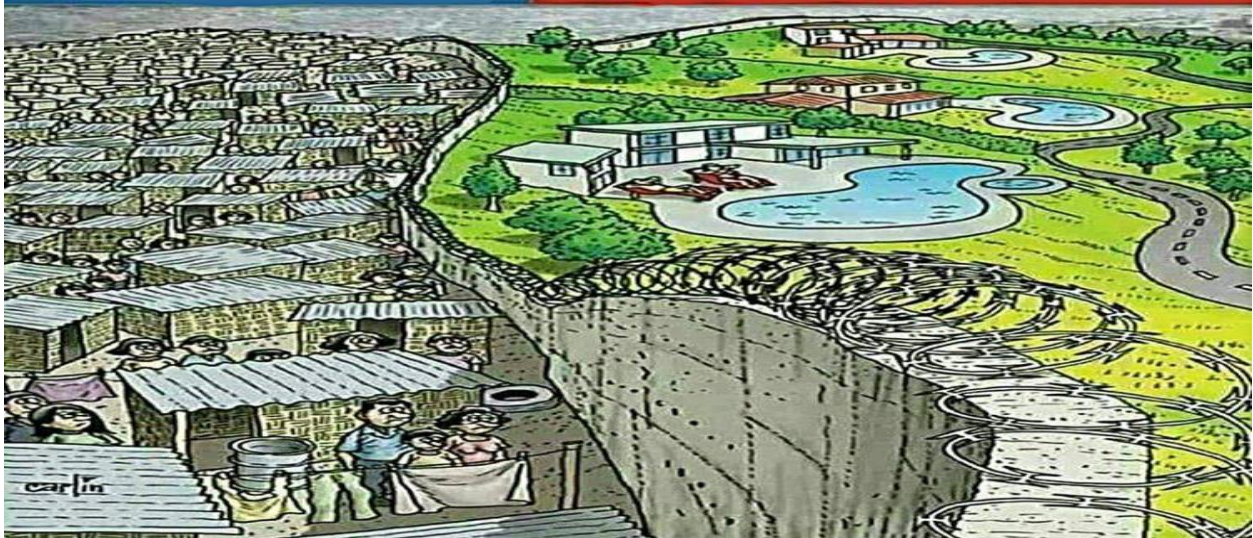
**Joyce Meyer – Net Worth  
\$25 Million**

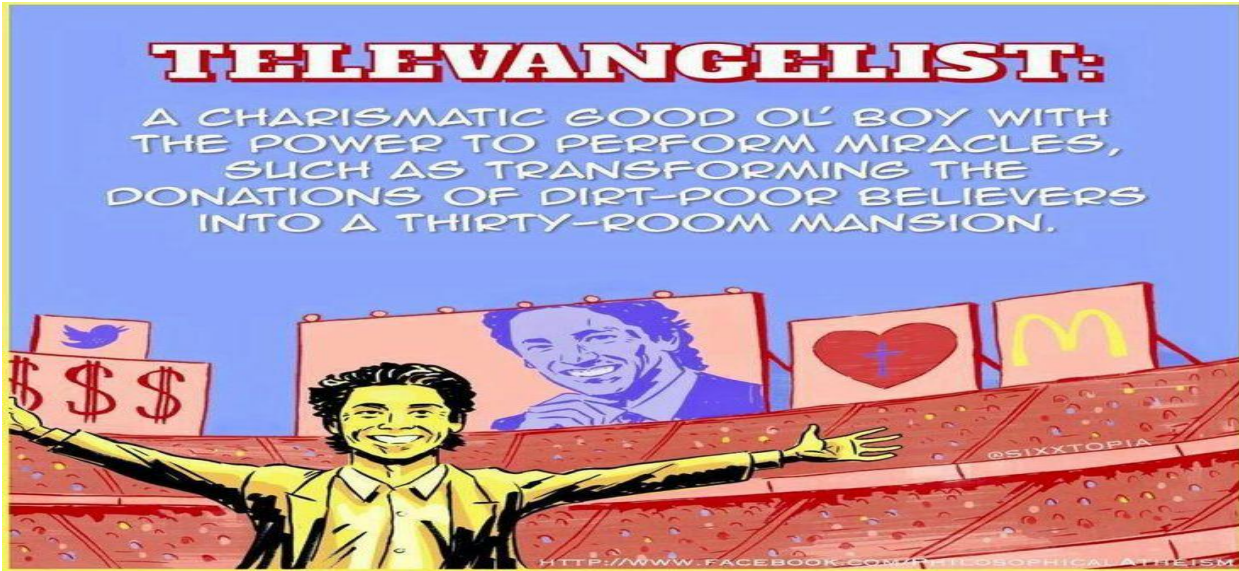


**Kenneth Copeland – Net  
Worth Unknown; boasts  
that he is a billionaire**






## **Evangelical Flock**

## **Evangelical Pastors**





## TELEVANGELIST INFIDELITY MATRIX

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| <br>SWAGGART | X                  | X          |                    | X      |                |       |      | X                                |
| <br>HAGGARD  |                    |            |                    |        | X              |       | X    | X                                |
| <br>LAMB     |                    |            |                    |        |                |       |      | X                                |
| <br>DANIELS  |                    |            |                    |        |                |       |      | X                                |

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## **LIST OF CHRISTIAN EVANGELISTS INVOLVED IN SCANDALS:**

### **Aimee Semple McPherson, 1920s–40s**

Main article: [Aimee Semple McPherson](#)

One of the most famous evangelist scandals involved Canadian-born Aimee Semple McPherson in the 1920s, who allegedly faked her own death. She later claimed that she had been kidnapped, but a grand jury could neither prove that a kidnapping occurred, nor that she had faked it. [Roberta Semple Salter](#), her daughter from her first marriage, became estranged from Semple McPherson and successfully sued her mother's attorney for slander during the 1930s. As a result of this she was cut out of her mother's will. Aimee Semple McPherson died in 1944 from an accidental overdose of [barbiturates](#).

### **Lonnie Frisbee, 1970s–1980s**

Main article: [Lonnie Frisbee](#)

Lonnie Frisbee was an American closeted gay Pentecostal evangelist and self-described "seeing prophet" in the late 1960s and 1970s who despite his "hippie" appearance had notable success as a minister and evangelist. Frisbee was a key figure in the [Jesus Movement](#) and was involved in the rise of two worldwide denominations ([Calvary Chapel](#) and the [Vineyard Movement](#)). Both churches later disowned him because of his active homosexuality, removing him first from leadership positions, then ultimately firing him. He eventually died from [AIDS](#) in 1993.

### **Marjoe Gortner, early 1970s**

Main article: [Marjoe Gortner](#)

Gortner rose to fame in the late 1940s as a child preacher, but he had simply been trained to do this by his parents and he had no personal faith. He was able to perform "miracles" and received large amounts of money in donations. After suffering a crisis of conscience, he invited a film crew to accompany him on a final preaching tour. The resulting film, [Marjoe](#), mixes footage of revival meetings with Gortner's explanations of how evangelists manipulate their audiences. It won the [1972 Academy Award](#) for [Best Documentary Feature](#), but was never screened in the [Southern United States](#) due to fears that it would cause outrage in the [Bible Belt](#).<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Billy James Hargis, early 1970s**

Main article: [Billy James Hargis](#)

Hargis was a prolific author and radio evangelist. Hargis formed [American Christian College](#) in 1971 to teach fundamentalist Christian principles. However, a [sex scandal](#) erupted at the College, involving claims that Hargis had sex with male and female students. Hargis was forced out of American Christian College's presidency as a result. Further scandals erupted when members of Hargis' youth choir, the "All American Kids", accused Hargis of sexual misconduct as well. The college eventually closed down in the mid-1970s. Hargis denied the allegations publicly.

### **Jim & Tammy Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart, 1986 and 1991**

Main articles: [Jimmy Swaggart](#) and [Jim Bakker](#)

In 1986, evangelist Jimmy Swaggart began on-screen attacks against fellow televangelists Marvin Gorman and Jim Bakker. He uncovered Gorman's affair with a member of Gorman's congregation, and also helped expose Bakker's infidelity (which was arranged by a colleague

while on an out-of-state trip).<sup>[2]</sup> These exposures received widespread media coverage. Gorman retaliated in kind by hiring a private investigator to uncover Swaggart's own adulterous indiscretions with a prostitute.<sup>[3]</sup> Swaggart was subsequently forced to step down from his pulpit for a year and made a tearful televised apology in February 1988 to his congregation, saying "I have sinned against you, my Lord, and I would ask that your precious blood would wash and cleanse every stain until it is in the seas of God's forgiveness."<sup>[4][5]</sup>

Swaggart was caught again by California police three years later in 1991 with another prostitute, Rosemary Garcia, who was riding with him in his car when he was stopped for driving on the wrong side of the road. When asked why she was with Swaggart, she replied, "He asked me for sex. I mean, that's why he stopped me. That's what I do. I'm a prostitute."<sup>[6]</sup>

### **Peter Popoff, 1987**

Main article: [Peter Popoff](#)

A self-proclaimed prophet and faith healer in the 1980s, Popoff's ministry went bankrupt in 1987 after magician and skeptic [James Randi](#) and [Steve Shaw debunked](#) his methods by showing that instead of receiving information about audience members from [supernatural](#) sources, he received it through an in-ear receiver.<sup>[7]</sup>

### **Morris Cerullo, 1990s**

Main article: [Morris Cerullo](#)

A number of incidents involving California-based televangelist [Morris Cerullo](#) caused outrage in the [United Kingdom](#) during the 1990s. Cerullo's claims of faith healing were the focus of particular concern. At a London crusade in 1992, he pronounced a child [cancer](#) sufferer to be healed, yet the girl died two months later. Multiple complaints were upheld against [satellite television](#) channels transmitting Cerullo's claims of faith-healing, and a panel of doctors concluded that Cerullo's claims of miraculous healing powers could not be substantiated. Cerullo also produced fund-raising material which was condemned as unethical by a number of religious leaders, as it implied that giving money to his organisation would result in family members becoming Christians.<sup>[8]</sup>

### **Mike Warnke, 1991**

Main article: [Mike Warnke](#)

Warnke was a popular Christian evangelist and comedian during the 1970s and 1980s. He claimed in his autobiography, *[The Satan Seller](#)* (1973), that he had once been deeply involved in a Satanic cult and was a Satanic priest before converting to Christianity. In 1991, [Cornerstone magazine](#) launched an investigation into Warnke's life and testimony. It investigated Warnke's life, from interviews with over one hundred personal friends and acquaintances, to his ministry's tax receipts. Its investigation turned up damaging evidence of fraud and deceit. The investigation also revealed the unflattering circumstances surrounding Warnke's multiple marriages, affairs, and divorces. Most critically, however, the investigation showed how Warnke could not possibly have done the many things he claimed to have done throughout his nine-month tenure as a Satanist, much less become a drug-addicted dealer or become a Satanic high priest.

### **Robert Tilton, 1991**

Main article: [Robert Tilton](#)

Tilton is an American televangelist who achieved notoriety in the 1980s and early 1990s through his paid television program *[Success-N-Life](#)*. At its peak, it aired in all 235 American TV markets. In 1991, [Diane Sawyer](#) and [ABC News](#) conducted an investigation of Tilton. The investigation,

broadcast on ABC's Primetime Live on November 21, 1991, found that Tilton's ministry threw away prayer requests without reading them, keeping only the money or valuables sent to them by viewers, garnering his ministry an estimated \$80 million [USD](#) a year. In the original investigation, one of Tilton's former prayer hotline operators claimed that the ministry cared little for desperate followers who called for prayer, saying that Tilton had a computer installed in July 1989 to make sure that the phone operators were off the line in seven minutes. Tilton sued ABC for libel in 1992, but the case was dismissed in 1993, and Tilton's show was off the air by October 30, 1993.

### **W. V. Grant, 1996 and 2003**

Main article: [W. V. Grant](#)

Like Peter Popoff, Grant was investigated by [James Randi](#) regarding his faith healing claims. He was then imprisoned for tax evasion in 1996. After restarting his ministry upon release, a TV investigation found that claims of healing he made at a 2003 revival in Atlanta were false.

### **Bob Moorehead, 1998**

Main article: [Bob Moorehead](#)

Moorehead, pastor of the [Overlake Christian Church](#) from the 1970s to June, 1998 was arrested in July, 1996 on a charge of indecent exposure in a public restroom in Daytona Beach, Florida. He stepped down amid allegations of molestation of adult members during baptism and wedding ceremonies that went as far back as 20 years earlier. <sup>[9]</sup>

### **Roy Clements, 1999**

Main article: [Roy Clements](#)

Clements was a prominent figure within British evangelical christianity. In 1999, he revealed he was in a homosexual relationship with another man, resigned his pastorship, and separated from his wife. He had written a number of well-received books which were withdrawn from sale when the news broke.<sup>[10]</sup>

### **John Paulk, 2000**

Main article: [John Paulk](#)

John Paulk (no relation to [Earl Paulk](#)) is a former leader of [Focus on the Family's](#) Love Won Out conference and former chairman of the board for [Exodus International North America](#). His claimed shedding of homosexuality is also the subject of his autobiography *Not Afraid to Change*. In September 2000, Paulk was found and photographed in a [Washington, D.C.](#) gay bar, and accused by opponents of flirting with male patrons at the bar. Later questioned by gay rights activist [Wayne Besen](#), Paulk denied being in the bar despite photographic proof to the contrary. Initially, FoF's Dr. [James Dobson](#) sided with Paulk and supported his claims. Subsequently, Paulk, who himself had written about his habit of lying while he openly lived as a homosexual, confessed to being in the bar, but claimed he entered the establishment for reasons other than sexual pursuits. Paulk retained his Board seat for Exodus, however he did so while on probation. Paulk did not run again for chairman of the board of Exodus when his term expired.

### **Paul Crouch, 2004**

Main article: [Paul Crouch](#)

Paul Crouch is the founder and president of the [Trinity Broadcasting Network](#), or TBN, the world's largest [evangelical Christian television network](#), as well as the former host of TBN's flagship variety show, [Praise the Lord](#). In September 2004, the [Los Angeles Times](#) published a

series of articles raising questions about the fundraising practices and financial transparency of TBN, as well as the allegations of a former ministry employee, [Enoch Lonnie Ford](#), that he had a homosexual affair with Crouch during the 1990s. TBN denied the allegations, claiming that Ford's claims were part of an [extortion](#) scheme and that the *Times* was a "left-wing and anti-Christian newspaper." In 2005, Ford appeared at the taping of the [ION Television](#) show [Lie Detector](#). The show's Producers decided not to air the show, and the outcome of the lie detector test was never released. Consequently, none of the alleged charges were substantiated.

### **Douglas Goodman, 2004**

Douglas Goodman, an evangelical preacher, and his wife Erica were pastors of Victory Christian Centre in [London, England](#). The church was one of the largest in the United Kingdom. He came into notoriety when he was jailed for three and a half years for the sexual assault of four members of his congregation in 2004. VCC was closed by the [Charity Commission](#), but his wife Erica started a new church, Victory to Victory, in Wembley. Douglas has upon his release resumed full pastoral ministry alongside his wife.<sup>[11][12][13][14][15]</sup>

### **Kent Hovind, 2006**

Main article: [Kent Hovind](#)

Kent Hovind is an American Baptist minister and [Young Earth creationist](#). He is most famous for "creation science" seminars, in which he argues for Young Earth creationism, using his self-formulated "Hovind Theory." He has been criticized by both the mainstream scientific community and other creationists. In 2006, Hovind who also has a reputation as a tax protestor had been charged with falsely declaring bankruptcy, making threats against federal officials, filing false complaints, failing to get necessary building permits, and various tax-related charges. He was convicted of 58 federal tax offenses and related charges, for which he is currently serving a ten-year sentence.<sup>[16]</sup>

### **Ted Haggard, 2006**

Main article: [Ted Haggard](#)

Ted Haggard was the pastor of the [New Life Church](#) in [Colorado Springs, Colorado](#) and was the president of the [National Association of Evangelicals](#) (NAE) from 2003 until November 2006. Haggard's position allowed him occasional access to President [George W. Bush](#). In 2006 it was alleged that Haggard had been regularly visiting a male prostitute who also provided him with [methamphetamine](#). Haggard admitted his wrongdoing and resigned as pastor of New Life church and as president of the NAE. The high-profile case was significant also because it immediately preceded the [2006 mid-term elections](#) and may have even affected national voting patterns<sup>[citation needed]</sup>. In January 2009, Haggard admitted to a second homosexual relationship with a male church member on CNN-TV and other national media, and when asked, would not directly answer a question about his other possible homosexual relationships.<sup>[17]</sup> Ted Haggard has recently started a new church.<sup>[18]</sup>

### **Paul Barnes, 2006**

Main article: [Paul Barnes](#)

Paul Barnes is the founder and former senior minister of the evangelical church Grace Chapel in Douglas County, Colorado. He confessed his homosexual activity to the church board, and his resignation was accepted on December 7, 2006.<sup>[19]</sup> He started the church in his basement and watched it reach a membership of 2,100 in his 28 years of leadership. This scandal was notable because it was similar to Ted Haggard's (above), it occurred in the same state (Colorado) and



around the same time (late 2006).

### **Lonnie Latham, 2006**

Main article: [Lonnie Latham](#)

In 2006, Latham, the senior pastor of South Tulsa Baptist Church and a member of the powerful [Southern Baptist Convention](#) Executive Committee, was arrested for "offering to engage in an act of lewdness" with a male undercover police officer.<sup>[20]</sup>

### **Gilbert Deya, 2006**

Main article: [Gilbert Deya](#)

Kenyan-born Deya moved to the United Kingdom in the 1990s and started a number of churches. He claims to have supernatural powers that allow him to make infertile women become pregnant and give birth. However, police investigations in the [UK](#) and [Kenya](#) concluded that Deya and his wife were stealing Kenyan babies. Deya was arrested in London during December 2006 and as of April 2010 he is currently fighting [extradition](#) to Kenya.<sup>[21]</sup>

### **Richard Roberts, 2007**

Main article: [Richard Roberts](#)

In October 2007, televangelist Richard Roberts (son of the late televangelist [Oral Roberts](#)), was president of [Oral Roberts University](#) until his forced resignation on November 23, 2007. Roberts was named as a defendant in a lawsuit alleging improper use of university funds for political and personal purposes and improper use of university resources.<sup>[22]</sup>

### **Earl Paulk, 2007**

Main article: [Earl Paulk](#)

Earl Paulk (no relation to [John Paulk](#)) was the founder and head pastor of Chapel Hill Harvester Church in [Decatur, Georgia](#) from 1960 until the 1990s. A number of women from the congregation came forward during the 1990s claiming that Paulk had sexual relations with them. Some of these claims have subsequently been proven correct. Moreover, Donnie Earl Paulk, the current senior pastor of the church and nephew of Earl Paulk, had a court-ordered DNA test in 2007 which showed that he was Earl's son, not his nephew, which means that Earl and his sister-in-law had had a sexual relationship which led to Donnie's birth.<sup>[23]</sup>

### **Coy Privette, 2007**

Main article: [Coy Privette](#)

Privette is a [Baptist pastor](#), [conservative](#) activist, and politician in the [U.S. state](#) of [North Carolina](#). Privette was president of the Christian Action League and a prominent figure in North Carolina moral battles. In 2007, Privette resigned as president of North Carolina's Christian Action League and from the Board of Directors of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina, following revelations on July 19 that he had been charged with six counts of aiding and abetting prostitution.<sup>[24]</sup>

### **Thomas Wesley Weeks, III, 2007**

Main article: [Thomas Wesley Weeks, III](#)

Weeks married fellow evangelist [Juanita Bynum](#) in 2002, but they separated in May 2007. In August 2007, Weeks physically assaulted Bynum in a hotel parking lot and was convicted of the crime in March 2008. The couple divorced in June 2008 and Weeks remarried in October 2009.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Michael Reid, 2008

Main article: [Michael Reid](#)

Bishop [Michael Reid](#) (born 1944) is a Christian evangelist in [Essex, England](#) and founder of [Michael Reid Ministries](#) who resigned from the role of pastor at Peniel Church in April 2008, after admitting to an eight-year extra-marital sexual relationship. The scandal was widely reported online<sup>[26][27][28]</sup> and in UK newspapers.<sup>[29][30]</sup> He has since re-developed an itinerant evangelistic ministry and has been speaking at a number of churches in the UK and overseas.

## Joe Barron, 2008

Joe Barron, one of the 40 ministers at [Prestonwood Baptist Church](#), one of the largest churches in the United States with 26,000 members, was arrested on May 15, 2008 for solicitation of a minor after driving from the Dallas area to [Bryan, Texas](#), in order to allegedly engage in sexual relations with what he thought to be a 13 year-old girl he had met online. Barron's online communications had in fact been with undercover law enforcement official.<sup>[31][32][33]</sup>

## Todd Bentley, 2008

Main article: [Todd Bentley](#)

Canadian Todd Bentley rose to prominence as the evangelist at the [Lakeland Revival](#) in [Florida](#), which began in April 2008. Bentley claimed that tens of thousands of people were healed at the revival. However, in August 2008, he stepped down permanently when it was revealed he was separating from his wife, Shonnah, and was in a relationship with Jessa Hasbrook, a member of his staff.<sup>[34]</sup>

## George Alan Rekers, 2010

Main article: [George Alan Rekers](#)

Penn Bullock and Brandon K. Thorp of the [Miami New Times](#) reported on May 4, 2010, that on April 13, 2010, Christian leader [George Alan Rekers](#) was encountered and photographed at Miami International Airport returning from an extended overseas trip with a twenty-year-old "[rent boy](#)", or gay male prostitute, known as "Lucien" (later identified as Jo-Vanni Roman). Given his opinion on homosexuals and homosexual behavior, the scandal surrounds Rekers' decision to employ a homosexual escort as a traveling companion, and how that runs contrary to Rekers' public stances on such issues.

Rekers claimed that Lucien was there to help carry Rekers' luggage as Rekers had allegedly had recent surgery, yet Rekers was seen carrying his own luggage when he and Lucien were spotted at the airport.<sup>[35]</sup> On his blog, Rekers denied having sex with the man.<sup>[36]</sup> In subsequent interviews, Roman said Rekers had paid him to provide nude massages daily, which included genital touching.

## Eddie L. Long, 2010

Main article: [Eddie L. Long](#)

In September 2010 several civil complaints were filed against Eddie L. Long by men that stated Mr. Long used his position as the church leader to entice or coerce the men into consensual sexual relationships in exchange for money, travel and goods. At a press event on September 26, 2010 Mr. Long stated he would fight the civil complaints in court and would not comment on the allegations. On December 7th 2010, Rev. Long settled the matter out of court.<sup>[37]</sup>

## Vaughn Reeves, 2010

Special Judge Dena Martin ordered former pastor Vaughn Reeves to serve consecutive six-year terms for each of nine fraud counts, in a scheme that cost about 2,900 investors \$13.1

million.<sup>[38]</sup> Among aggravating factors, Martin found Reeves targeted people over age 65 and used religion to influence them. Reeves' attorney plans to appeal. Investigators said Reeves and his three sons used their now-defunct company, Alanar, to trick about 11,000 investors into buying bonds worth \$120 million secured by mortgages on church construction projects.<sup>[39]</sup> Instead, Reeves and his sons diverted money from new investments to pay off previous investors, pocketing \$6 million and buying luxuries.<sup>[39]</sup>

### **Stephen Green, 2011**

Stephen Green, a former Chairman of the Conservative Family Campaign who attends an [Assemblies of God](#) Church, is head of [Christian Voice](#), a Conservative Christian pressure group in the UK.

In January 2011, Green's former wife, Caroline Green, accused him of repeatedly physically assaulting her and their children, including one incident where he allegedly beat her with a weapon until she bled, and another in which their son allegedly required hospital treatment after having been beaten with a piece of wood.<sup>[40]</sup>

### **Albert Odulele, 2011**

In February 2011, [televangelist](#) and senior pastor of Glory house London: Dr. [Albert Odulele](#) was charged with two counts of [sexual assault](#), one involving a 14-year-old boy and another on a 21-year-old man. Although he initially denied the charges, he later pleaded guilty and confessed that he had been battling with his sexuality for many years. He was subsequently sentenced at Woolwich crown court to 8 and 6 months in Prison to run concurrently. He will be on the sex offenders register for 5 years. He is currently serving his sentence. <sup>[41]</sup>

### **SENATE PROBE**

In 2007, [Senator Chuck Grassley \(R-IA\)](#) opened a probe into the finances of six televangelists who preach a "[prosperity gospel](#)".<sup>[42]</sup> The probe investigated reports of lavish lifestyles by televangelists including: fleets of [Rolls Royces](#), palatial mansions, private jets and other expensive items purportedly paid for by television viewers who donate due to the ministries' encouragement of offerings. The six that were investigated are:

- [Kenneth Copeland](#) and [Gloria Copeland](#) of Kenneth Copeland Ministries of Newark, Texas;
- [Creflo Dollar](#) and Taffi Dollar of World Changers Church International and Creflo Dollar Ministries of College Park, Ga;
- [Benny Hinn](#) of World Healing Center Church Inc. and Benny Hinn Ministries of Grapevine, Texas;
- [Eddie L. Long](#) of New Birth Missionary Baptist Church and Bishop Eddie Long Ministries of Lithonia, Ga;
- [Joyce Meyer](#) and David Meyer of Joyce Meyer Ministries of Fenton, Mo; and
- Randy White and ex-wife [Paula White](#) of the multiracial Without Walls International Church and Paula White Ministries of Tampa.
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# After Gloria Copeland Banishes the Flu, Let's Look at Dallas Televangelists' Biggest Crimes and Misdemeanors

[STEPHEN YOUNG](#) | FEBRUARY 14, 2018 | 4:00AM

Last week, Gloria Copeland, matriarch of Kenneth Copeland's Tarrant County TV ministry empire, told everyone the truth they needed to hear: The flu season, the same one that's killed more than 60 people in Dallas County and sickened thousands of others, didn't *really* exist. Anyone with true faith didn't need to worry, because Copeland was about to give them their Jesus shot.

“Flu, I bind you off of the people in the name of Jesus,” Copeland said, uttering a phrase that, in the eyes of the *Observer's* Jim Schutze, confirmed that she was, in fact, [a witch](#).

Copeland's bizarre behavior is but the latest leap off the deep end for North Texas' vibrant community of televangelist hucksters, who've been plying their trade here for decades. While Copeland has our collective memories' stirred, let's take a look at the best of the worst of Dallas' TV preachers, starting right back with the Copelands.

## **1. The measles break out at Kenneth Copeland's Eagle Mountain**

**International Church.** — Preach that there's a link between vaccines and autism, as Kenneth Copeland did on his [online talk show](#), and you probably shouldn't be too surprised when the measles break out at your church, as they did at Eagle Mountain [in August 2013](#).

**2. Robert Tilton goes broke.** — The silver-coiffed, McKinney-born Tilton was one of the first major preachers of the prosperity gospel, which taught that all problems in life, including poverty, existed only because of sin. He encouraged his followers to give him whatever they could, regardless their financial station, and

lived on the proceeds until being felled by a *Primetime Live* investigation in 1991, which found hundreds of pounds of prayer requests sent to Tilton in the garbage outside an Oklahoma recycling plant.

In 2016, WFAA's Brett Shipp tracked Tilton down in California. He was still preaching, but his flock was so small they met in the conference room of a Marriott.

**3. Bedford preacher Marcus Lamb admits his affair live on TV.** — In a excruciating bit of television in 2010, Marcus Lamb, co-founder of the Daystar Christian television network, admitted that he'd had an affair and was the subject of a Satan-inspired extortion plot.

"They're trying to take our pain and turn it to their gain," Lamb said as he sat next to his wife, Joni Lamb. "We're not going to take God's money to keep from being humiliated."

Lamb must not have been too humiliated. He followed up his confession with trips to appear on *Good Morning America* and the Dr. Phil show.

**4. W.V. Grant goes to jail.** — After taking over the Soul's Harbor Church in Oak Cliff in 1983, W.V. Grant moved his flock to a 28-acre parcel near Dallas Baptist University in 1987. From there, he built the rechristened Eagle's Nest Family Church into a 5,000-member empire.

In 1996, federal authorities indicted Grant for tax evasion. One piece of evidence, an undercover video tape, showed Grant admitting to using \$100,000 in contributions to the church to pay the down payment on a \$1.2 million home in DeSoto. A judge sentenced Grant to 16 months in prison, a \$30,000 fine and forced him to send the details of his conviction to everyone on his mailing list.

Eagle's Nest sold its building to the Potter's House, where it became the center of TD Jakes massive empire. After getting out of prison, Grant began preaching again, eventually purchasing the historic First Church of Christ, Scientist on Cadiz Street downtown, at which he still preaches.

**5. Benny Hinn gets raided.** — Last summer, the FBI raided the Grapevine offices of Benny Hinn, the preacher best known for his "Miracle Crusades" at which he performs faith healings at sports stadiums around the world. While Hinn, who admits to taking home a salary in excess of \$500,000 a year and flies around the world on a private jet — hasn't been charged with anything, he and his family are used to being under investigation.

In 2007, Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassley investigated Hinn and six other televangelists with the Senate Finance Committee. In 2013, Brazilian police arrested Hinn's son Joshua after he and several of Hinn's bodyguards allegedly attacked a deaf man who approached the stage during one of the elder Hinn's revivals in Brazil.

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# GOD'S GRACE: INDIVIDUAL ISSUES

## Misconceptions About Grace

*Patrick Farish*

THERE IS NO GREATER GOOD THAN THE grace of God, personified in Jesus Christ. Paul wrote that “the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men” (Titus 2:11)—but then we read of “ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4). Our need of the true grace of God makes it essential that we be aware of, as well as able to oppose and to expose any misconceptions about grace.

**One misconception about grace leads some to minimize sin.** Paul, teaching that “where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly” (Romans 5:20), anticipated an objection by asking in 6:1, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” Would one, from misunderstanding or malice, say, “Hey, if so much sin means so much *more* grace, then we give God an opportunity to be even more gracious by our sin; so, let’s just sin more?” No matter; the refutation in 6:2 is unequivocal: “We who died to sin, we cannot any longer continue therein”—we *died* to sin, we cannot continue in it any longer, for any reason.

Romans 6:15 asks a similar question: “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Paul had just taught that “sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under law, but under grace” (verse 14). Now, sin *dominates* sinners under a law system, because a law system cannot make alive (Galatians 3:21). Under grace, however, God “justifieth the ungodly” (Romans 4:5); so the misconception is, “Since we can be forgiven under grace, sin is no big deal; why worry?” Again, the pointed refutation: “Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servant ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16).

A contemporary misconception about grace which minimizes the seriousness of sin construes “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7) as offering cleansing from sin apart from a conscious reaction of the erring Christian. The fact is that we “walk by faith” (2 Corinthians 5:7) when we instruct Christians as to the necessity of repenting and praying (Acts 8:22) and confessing our sins (1 John 1:9); and assurance beyond that we cannot give, and still walk by faith (Romans 10:17). Can we walk in the light, and not at the same time walk by faith?

**Another misconception about grace involves God’s forgiving us and reckoning us righteous.** The Bible teaches that God became man, and tells why: “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). He became man so He could die; and His death was *substitutionary*, i.e., “Christ died *for* the ungodly” (Romans 5:6); “Christ died *for* us” (Romans 5:8); “Christ died *for* our sins” (1 Corinthians 15:3), et al. The misconception is that Christ *lived* for us: that the perfection of His flawless life is transferred to me to cover for, not blot out, my imperfect life; and thus I am “home free” even in my sin. The passages thought to prove this notion about the life of Christ do not; they allude rather to that which He *now* does for us: having been “reconciled through the death of Christ we are “saved by his life” (Romans 5:10)—for He “ever liveth to make intercession” (Hebrews 7:25). The perfection of Jesus’ life was to qualify Him as a sacrifice—the “Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). When God imputes (reckons) righteousness today, it is because one has been cleansed, *forgiven*, by the blood of Christ (Romans 4:6–8).

**Still another misconception about grace deprecates man’s duty.** Some read “by grace have ye been saved ... not of works” (Ephesians 2:8f) and conclude that “not of works” excludes obedience. Wrong. The purpose of the exclusion of “works” is “that no man should glory.” In what “works” might man glory (boast)? In Romans 4:2 Paul said, “if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory;” and in verse 4 he tells what is meant in that context by “work”—“Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt.” The “work” that justifies is therefore the flawless work that would *deserve* the reward, so a person could brag about it. Grace excludes such works, not arbitrarily but because if man has *earned* his reward it *cannot* be “unearned favor” (grace). Mark this: man’s search for grace is an admission of *sin*, a confession that his works have not been perfect. The obedience of faith is non-meritorious but still an *essential* element of access by faith into grace (Romans 1:5; 5:1f).

Some want to hear more about grace, and less about duty. And, “Having itching ears, [they] heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts.” We need to remember that “Old, Old Story”—but it is indisputable that the New Testament gives significant, emphatic attention to the duty of man, reminding him repeatedly of his responsibility. God does not need to be urged to save us—He is faithful. Man *does* need to be urged to the obedience of faith to convert; and he *does* need to be exhorted to faithfulness. Just before the warning about “itching ears,” Paul had told Timothy to “preach the word; be urgent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). We may not like to be reminded of how far short we fall; but if we are prone to become “partakers of the divine nature” we must be receptive to being “put in remembrance of these things, though ye know them” (2 Peter 1:4–12).

Let us not be ignorant of the devices of our adversary, the devil; let us continue in the grace of God.

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<sup>38</sup> Farish, P. (1984). [Misconceptions About Grace](#). (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 21.



## The Plea: Remove the Thorn

Paul wrestled with that one. He knew the angst of unanswered prayer. At the top of his prayer list was an unidentified request that dominated his thoughts. He gave the appeal a code name: “a thorn in my flesh” (2 Cor. 12:7 NIV). Perhaps the pain was too intimate to put on paper. Maybe the request was made so often he reverted to shorthand. “I’m here to talk about the thorn again, Father.” Or could it be that by leaving the appeal generic, Paul’s prayer could be our prayer? For don’t we all have a thorn in the flesh?

Somewhere on life’s path our flesh is pierced by a person or a problem. Our stride becomes a limp, our pace is slowed to a halt, we try to walk again only to wince at each effort. Finally, we plead with God for help. Such was the case with Paul. You don’t get a thorn unless you’re on the move, and Paul never stopped. Thessalonica, Jerusalem, Athens, Corinth—if he wasn’t preaching, he was in prison because of his preaching. But his walk was hampered by this thorn. The barb pierced through the sole of his sandal and into the soul of his heart and soon became a matter of intense prayer. “I begged the Lord three times to take this problem away from me” (2 Cor. 12:8). This was no casual request, no P.S. in a letter. It was the first plea of the first sentence. “Dear God, I need some help!”

Nor was this a superficial prickle. It was a “stabbing pain” (PHILLIPS). Every step he took sent a shudder up his leg. Three different times he limped over to the side of the trail and prayed. His request was clear, and so was God’s response, “My grace is sufficient” (v. 9 NIV).

What was this thorn in the flesh? No one knows for sure, but here are the top candidates.

1. Paul battling the flesh? Maybe. After all, Paul was a single man. He describes the temptress like one who knew her firsthand. (Romans 7:18–19).

2. Perhaps the problem was not the flesh but *foes*; not temptation but opposition. The passage hints at this possibility. “This problem was a messenger from Satan,” (2 Cor. 12:7). By the way, when Paul wrote that this “messenger of Satan” was sent “to beat me,” he wasn’t exaggerating. Read of his attacks.

I have been near death many times. Five times the Jews have given me their punishment of thirty-nine lashes with a whip. Three different times I was beaten with rods. One time I was almost stoned to death. Three times I was in ships that wrecked, and one of those times I spent a night and a day in the sea. I have gone on many travels and have been in danger from rivers, thieves, my own people, the Jews, and those who are not Jews. I have been in danger in cities, in places where no one lives, and on the sea. And I have been in danger with false Christians. (2 Cor. 11:23–26)

Could anyone fault Paul for asking for a reprieve? A body can endure only so much. One grows weary living in the cross hairs of Satan’s scope. “God, what if we limit this year to verbal attacks and let my sores heal? Or could we stagger the whippings and the stonings so they don’t come at the same time? I’ve got a bruise on my neck that wakes me up each time I roll over. And remember the night in the jail in Philippi? My back hasn’t recovered yet.”

3. Of course, there were those who thought Paul deserved every lash, which leads us to a third option. Some think the thorn was his *abrasive nature*. Whatever he learned at the feet of Gamaliel, he may have dozed off the day they discussed the topic of tact.

Before he knew grace, he had killed Christians. After he knew grace, he grilled the Christians. Example? “When Peter came to Antioch, I challenged him to his face, because he was wrong” (Gal. 2:11). Written like a true diplomat. In Paul’s view you were on God’s side or Satan’s side, and should you slide from the first to the second he didn’t keep it a secret, “Hymenaeus and Alexander have done that, and I have given them to Satan so they will learn not to speak against God” (1 Tim. 1:20).

Everyone within range of his tongue and pen knew how he felt and knew when to duck.

4. On the other hand, a case can be made that the thorn was not temptation, opposition, or public relation skills; it could have been *his body*. Remember his words at the end of one of his letters? “See what large letters I use to write this myself” (Gal. 6:11). Maybe his eyes were bad. Could be he never got over that trip to Damascus. God got his attention with a light so bright Paul was left blind for three days. Maybe he never fully recovered. His clear vision of the cross may have come at the cost of a clear vision of anything else. He wrote of the Galatians that, “you would have taken out your eyes and given them to me if that were possible” (4:15).

In Paul’s profession poor eyesight could be an occupational hazard. It’s hard to travel if you can’t see the trail. Not easy to write epistles if you can’t see the page. Poor vision leads to strained eyes, which leads to headaches, which leads to long nights and long prayers for relief. “God, any chance I could see?” It’s hard to impress the crowd if you’re making eye contact with a tree thinking it’s a person. Which brings to mind one final possibility.

5. We assume Paul was a dynamic speaker, but those who heard him might disagree. “His speaking is nothing,” he overheard them say in Corinth (2 Cor. 10:10). The apostle didn’t argue with them. “When I came to you, I was weak and fearful and trembling. My teaching and preaching were not with words of wisdom that persuade people but proof of the power that the spirit gives” (1 Cor. 2:3–4). Translation? *I was so scared that I stuttered, so nervous that I forgot my point, and the fact that you heard anything at all is testimony to God.*

Let’s back away for a minute and tally this up. (I don’t know how you envisioned Paul, but that image may be about to change.) Tempted often. Beaten regularly. Opinionated. Dim-sighted. Thick-tongued. Is this the apostle Paul? No wonder some questioned if he were an apostle. And no wonder he prayed.

## The Principle: Grace Is Enough

Had God removed temptation, Paul may never have embraced God’s grace. Only the hungry value a feast, and Paul was starving. The self-given title on his office door read, “Paul, Chief of Sinners.” No pen ever articulated grace like Paul’s. That may be because no person ever appreciated grace like Paul. Persecution distills motives. In the end Paul’s motives were distilled to one force, “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Cor. 5:14).

Had God made him meek and mild, who would have faced the legalists and confronted the hedonists and challenged the judgmentalists? The reason the letter of Galatians is in your Bible is because Paul couldn’t stomach a diluted grace. Attribute the letters to Corinth to Paul’s intolerance of sloppy faith. Paul’s honesty may not have made many friends, but it sure made many disciples.

And Paul's eyes. If God had healed his eyesight, would Paul have had such insights? While the rest of the world was watching the world, Paul was seeing visions too great for words (2 Cor. 12:3-4).

And public speaking? Nothing intoxicates like the approval of the crowd. God may have just been keeping his apostle sober. Whatever the affliction, it was there for a purpose. And Paul knew it: "To keep me from becoming conceited." The God who despises pride did whatever necessary to keep Paul from becoming proud. In this case, he simply told him, "My grace is sufficient." In your case, he may be saying the same thing.

You wonder why God doesn't remove temptation from your life? If he did, you might lean on your strength instead of his grace. A few stumbles might be what you need to convince you: His grace is sufficient for your sin. You wonder why God doesn't remove the enemies in your life? Perhaps because he wants you to love like he loves. Anyone can love a friend, but only a few can love an enemy.

You wonder why God doesn't heal you? If he never gave you more than eternal life, could you ask for more than that? His grace is sufficient for gratitude. God's grace is still sufficient to finish what he began. And until he's finished, let Paul remind you that the power is in the message, not the messenger. His grace is sufficient to speak clearly even when you don't.

For all we don't know about thorns, we can be sure of this. God would prefer we have an occasional limp than a perpetual strut. And if it takes a thorn for him to make his point, he loves us enough not to pluck it out. God has every right to say no to us. We have every reason to say thanks to him. The parachute is strong, and the landing will be safe. His grace is sufficient.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). *In the grip of grace* (pp. 132-139). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

## Can One Fall From Grace?

*Robert Jackson*

THIS IS A VERY SERIOUS QUESTION THAT needs to be settled in the minds of religious thinking people. First, we must make our appeal to the word of God for the answer. Secondly, the answer can be understood. I realize that some can cloud the issue with their mishandling of the Scriptures. Yet, the truth is clear. Let us consider the following things:

**Consider 1: One must first be in grace.** It is evident that in order for one to fall from grace that he must first be in grace. “Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1–2). A careful study of this reveals how one has access to the grace of God. When one obeys the faith, he becomes a child of God, and thus stands in the grace of God. Paul stated it another way in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” The man in Christ is a new creature. He is a recipient of the grace of God. The man who is baptized upon his faith in Christ becomes a child of God (Galatians 3:26–27). He is in grace.

**Consider 2: Can he fall?** If one cannot fall from the grace of God, then the writers of the Word, guided by the Holy Spirit, wasted much space and time in teaching one how not to fall. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:2, “If ye keep in memory.” What if they forget? Would they still be in grace? Look at Hebrews 10:26: “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.” Here we are taught that one can wilfully turn from Christ as a sacrifice. The apostle Peter said that if the child of God did not add certain things to his faith, he would fall (2 Peter 1:5–11). In 1 Timothy 4:1, it plainly states that one will fall: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” Was Paul wrong? Was the Spirit wrong in guiding Paul? No. The truth is that one can fall from grace.

**Consider 3: The consequences of falling from grace.** It would do us all good to stop and consider the grave consequences of departing from the faith. It means that one is out of fellowship with God. He is missing the joy and peace of mind that comes from serving God. He has brought shame and disgrace to himself and to the name of God. He lives daily in fear of death, knowing that he will fall under the condemnation of God. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

If the doctrine be true that one cannot fall, just think of the time wasted in teaching people how to live. I grant that it would be a very easy doctrine to believe, but it is just not in harmony with the teaching of our Lord. It is true that some fall, and then come back. Others fall and never come back. "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift & were made partakers of the Holy Ghost" (Hebrews 6:4). I believe that a person with an open mind & an open Bible can see that one can fall from grace.

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<sup>40</sup> Jackson, R. (1984). [Can One Fall From Grace?](#) (B. Lewis, Ed.) *Christianity Magazine*, 1(6), 19.

# Charts: Misuse of Grace to Cover Sin

BY ROBERTS, TOM, ON FEBRUARY 1ST, 1999

*Unity of the Spirit US Unity in Diversity*  
*Tom M. Roberts*

## 1. UNIVERSAL NEED OF GRACE

*(Never Tire of Preaching It!)*

**Perfect Law-keeping Cannot Save Jew or Gentile: "All have sinned"**

**Introduction to Gospel of Grace: Abraham** Gospel of Grace: **PERFECTING**

REMEDIAL

**REDEMPTIVE**

**ATONING**

**RECONCILING**

**IMPUTES RIGHTEOUSNESS**

## 2. First Century Errors About Grace

*Rationale for fellowship with error*

### Gnostics

**1 Jn. 1:6: "...say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness..."**

### Philosophers

**Acts 17:18: Epicureans, Stoics**

**Col. 2:8, 20-22: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."**

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## 3. Augustine's View of Adam's Fall

**A. Had Supernatural Grace in Eden**

**B. By Use of Free Will, Man Fell**

**C. Resulting in:**

**Loss of Free Will**

**Obstruction of Knowledge**

**Loss of Grace, Loss of Paradise**

## **Concupiscence, Physical Death Hereditary Guilt**

**Redemption:  
Totally in Hands of God  
Irresistible Grace to Elect  
Sinner is Passive  
Holy Spirit Regeneration  
Gospel Obedience Impossible**

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## **4. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

- **John and Gnosticism – Nature of Man**
- **Augustine – Roman Catholicism**
- **Luther – Reformation – Calvinism**
- **Early America – Restoration**
- **Rejection of Calvinism and Creeds**
  - **“Scheme of Redemption” by Milligan**
  - **“Gospel Plan of Salvation” by Brents**
- **Churches of Christ Today**
  - **Untaught in Bible Basics**
  - **Reliance on Denominationalists**
  - **Tenets of Calvinism Re-introduced**
  - **“Neo-Calvinism” widespread today**

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## **5. “Shall We Continue In Sin?” (*Romans 6:1*)**

**“Our first Parents, by this Sin, fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and we in them, whereby death came upon all; all becoming dead in Sin, and wholly defiled, in all the faculties and parts of soul and body...From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.”**

London Confession, Baptist, Ch. Vi, part 2, 4

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## 6. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)

**"We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul. The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul ... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger ... The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul..."**

(Sam Morris, Pastor, First Baptist Church, Stamford, TX, from a tract, "Do A Christian's Sins Damn His Soul?")

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## 7. FIVE POINTS OF CALVINISM

- - **T – Total Hereditary Depravity**
  - U – Unconditional Election**
  - L – Limited Atonement**
  - I – Irresistible Grace**
  - P – Perseverance of the Saints**

**Plus**

**Imputed Righteousness** *Perverted Use of Biblical Truth By Which System Is Implemented*

- - - **"Transfer" Adam's Sin to Mankind**
    - **"Transfer" Mankind's Sin to Christ**
    - **"Transfer" Christ's Perfection to Lost**

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## 8. USE OF CALVINISM AMONG SECTARIANS



**Most Accept Calvinism as a Creed**

**Basis of Faith Only**

**Basis of Once Saved, Always Saved**

**Make a Distinction Between Faith/Works**

**Doctrine is Unimportant to Salvation**

**Unity in Diversity**

*Any doctrine, honestly held, is acceptable to God and cannot limit fellowship between believers.*

- - - **One church is as good as another!**
    - **One belief is as good as another!**

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## **9. USE OF CALVINISM AMONG CHURCHES OF CHRIST**

**Most Deny Believing in Calvinism**

**Terms are Re-defined with Same Result**

**Result: Hybrid "Neo-Calvinism"**

**Basis of Unity in Diversity**

*Redefinitions:*

**Faith/Works**

**Gospel/Doctrine**

**Justification/Sanctification**

**Doctrine Unimportant to Salvation**

**Fellowship Expanded to Include Error**

**Doctrinal Differences Do Not Limit Fellowship**

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## **10. UNITY IN DIVERSITY TODAY**

*(Gospel Doctrine Distinction)*

**ARE THESE MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE?**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Preach</b><br><b>“euangelizo”</b>                 | <b>Teach</b><br><b>“didasko”</b>                     |
| <b>Gospel</b><br><b>“euangelion”</b>                 | <b>Doctrine</b><br><b>“didaskalia, didache”</b>      |
| <b>Justification</b><br><b>“Basis of Fellowship”</b> | <b>Sanctification</b><br><b>“Unity in Diversity”</b> |

**Ignorance Not Allowed**

**Ignorance Allowed**

**Must Obey Perfectly**

**Perfection not Required**

**No Diversity**

**Diversity Permitted**

**“Right About Christ”**

**“Wrong About Doctrine”**

## **11. UNITY IN DIVERSITY TODAY**

*(Gospel Doctrine Distinction)*

**Ketcherside, Garrett, Hardin, Shelly, Et Al**

**Gospel**

**Distinct From**

**Doctrine**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Core Gospel – 7 Facts – Grace</b>         | <b>Doctrine – teaching, commands, law</b>            |
| <b>Saved – Establish Fellowship with God</b> | <b>Unity in Diversity – Fellowship with Brethren</b> |

*"If we are right about Christ, we can be wrong about matters of doctrine."  
"Perfectionists, Legalists, Pharisees, believe one must be right on every  
matter of doctrine."*

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## **12. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

**"There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiological matters such as congregational organization, on soteriological matters such as whether baptism is 'for' or 'because of' remission of sins"**

Carrol Osburn, "The Peaceable Kingdom," (Abilene, Restoration Perspectives, 1993, pp. 90-91)

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## **13. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

**"One who accepts the deity of Christ is God's child in prospect and my brother in deed."**

*Carl Ketcherside*

**"I agree with the brother who wrote that disagreements over instruments should not prevent us from enjoying a common Lord's table."**

*Calvin Warpula*

**"Whenever I see a man call God 'Father', I see a brother."**

*Max Lucado*

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## **14. Grace Covers Sins**

**"The present frontier is the frontier of a grace-based fellowship with all our brothers and sisters in Christ. A truth began to dawn on us in the 1960's and 70's and increasingly through the 1980's. That truth is that God's grace extends not only to our moral imperfections but also to our doctrinal short-comings.**

(Gary Pearson, "Image Magazine," Sept/Oct 1993, p. 32)

## **15. CALVINISTIC UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

*(Dabney-Frost Debate)*

**"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom. 4:8).**

### **Argument II**

1. **Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin, Rom. 4:8**
2. **One is made free from sin in baptism (Rom. 6:17), therefore...**
3. **Sin is not imputed to those baptized**

**(pp. 83, 183)**

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## **16. CALVINISTIC UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

*(Dabney-Frost Debate)*

**"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Rom. 4:8).**

### **Argument III**

1. **Adultery is a sin, Mt. 19:18**
2. **Sin is not imputed to the baptized, therefore:**
3. **Sin is not imputed to adulterers baptized**

**(pp. 83, 118)**

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## **17. UNITY IN DIVERSITY TODAY**

*(Grace Covers Sin)*

**"We are Under Grace, Not Law, Rom. 6:14."**

1. **Law demands Perfect Law-keeping, Gal. 3:10.**
2. **We are not under law (doctrine), but under grace.**
3. **We can be wrong about some matter of law and still be right with God.**

**Application is Being made to:**

## **Doctrinal Sins**

### **Moral Sins**

#### **Example: Adulterous Marriages**

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#### **18. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

**"...I also believe that anyone who studies the Bible with a pure and sincere heart will be led by the Holy Spirit to complete their salvation. And I do pray that if in my ignorance I said or did something to wound or to cause a soul to reject baptism, that God will consider their life and if that is all that would cause them to miss heaven, that he will allow his grace to forgive us both."**

Written statement to me during meeting in San Antonio, TX from a member at Oak Hills where Max Lucado is preacher

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#### **19. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

Right About Christ ~ Wrong About Doctrine

**"What is the basis of one's hope before God? Is it not that we sustain a right relationship with God through Christ? Therefore – does our salvation depend upon being right about everything or being right about Christ? In other words – if one is right about Christ then that one can be wrong about some doctrinal instruction without being lost, can he not?"**

Arnold Hardin, *The Persuader*, What is the Gospel?

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#### **20. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

**"I believe I urged you once to get hold of Chuck Swindoll's book 'Grace Awakening'. Did you? I really wish you would if you haven't. I know brethren often look down upon reading works from outside sources, but there is much light we can gain even from those who are not all the way in the light. Max Lucado's book 'In the Grip of Grace' is pretty good too, though not nearly as meaty or as good as Chuck's. I know what brethren think about Max Lucado as well – and I don't agree with Max's ecumenical leanings at all (his chapter on Rom 15 I totally disagree with) just as I don't agree with Swindoll's 'faith-only' views. But I believe overall Swindoll and**

**Lucado are correct in showing that we need to change our focus and our motivations. 'We are not under law but under grace' (Rom 6.15)."**

Randy Hohf to Mike Gray

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## **21. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

*Randy Hohf to Mike Gray*

**August 16, 1997**

"It is a matter of overall focus. I have come to realize in the past few years that **the focus in the gospel is the grace of God and the cross of Christ**. While obedience is certainly important, my righteousness is not based upon my personal righteousness but upon **God's grace**. This is what **churches of Christ have long lost sight of**. There is so much focus on perfect obedience and perfect understanding and perfect agreement with each other. There is so much legalism and Phariseeism.

The strife and division and negativism is killing us. And at **camp** we are trying to keep the focus positive and uplifting and to be "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2.1). (Note: The application of this is seen in that the Bible class director for the camp is David Ford, from the institutional church in Edmonton, AB, Canada. The teachers are advertised as "**chosen not only for their Biblical knowledge and teaching abilities, but also for their exemplary lives making them role models for the young people of the church**"

(camp brochure).

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## **22. "Not Under Law, But Under Grace"**

*Randy Hohf, Study Letter with Bobby Holmes, August 19, 1997*

"I believe in strict observance of God's book. I just do not think it is the basis of my justification. I am not under law but under grace (Rom 6.14). That does not free me from the need to obey God or from the conditions to his grace. **But it does free me from the demand of being perfect. If I am wrong in MDR, I hope I will one day find out about it, but I know and am absolutely confident that it does not effect my salvation because I know my heart and I know my**

**Lord.**"(Note: Application of not "under law but under grace"permits belief and practice of error, typical application of Calvinism.)"**My salvation is not based on my 100% perfect knowledge.** Thank God that my salvation is not based on whether or not I am correct on one topic. If it were, I would have no hope, for even if I were correct on MDR I would be wrong on something else, for sure. **Are you 100% perfect in your understanding of all of God's word?** If not, then why are you not a false teacher and an "enemy of the cross of Christ"? Is it because you pick and choose which things you can be right or wrong on?

"I too believe in the Biblical pattern and I try to call men to it. But simply because I happened to disagree with you on ONE issue, you marked me as a false teacher. It's your overall attitude portrayed in your articles and actions that are Pharisaical, arrogant and self-righteous.

"It is the idea that men must be 100% agreed on every issue in order to be in fellowship and everyone who is not 100% agreed with YOU is a false teacher. Right here is the whole crux. **It is this gospel of perfectionism rather than of grace that I am opposed to.** You place on men a yoke that 'neither we nor our fathers were able to bear' (Acts 15.10). There is no room or need for **grace** in your **doctrine**. It is rarely spoken about. Or if it is spoken of, it is mere lip service, because you make it all null and void by your actions. **By forcing on everyone a yoke of perfection, you destroy the gospel of grace.** The apostle Paul would have nothing to do with that kind of gospel. Most of what he wrote concerned that very issue. You "tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders" (the load of 100% perfection)."

Randy Hohf, Study Letter with Bobby Holmes, August 19, 1997

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### **23. "Shall We Continue In Sin?" (Romans 6:1)**

"I have contended that the guilty party cannot remarry because Jesus was referring specifically to the innocent party when he spoke of remarriage — that is, He was silent as to the guilty party remarrying. But, again, in all fairness, we should admit that **we are all having to make a judgment call on this—and where such judgment has to be exercised, we should not be disfellowshipping one another.** This does NOT mean that this matter is unimportant or a matter of indifference. But we are **simply letting the Lord be the judge in each situation...**"

(Don Partain, Dec. 3, 1997, as stated to Joe Price)

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## 24. "By Grace Through Faith"

"The Charge of Perfectionism"

**Grace "frees me from the demand of being perfect..."**

**"I am not under law but under grace."**

**Which "law" opposes grace?**

|              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| Law of Moses | Law of Christ |
| (Gal. 3:10)  | (Rom. 8:2)    |

**Which Law of Christ can I be wrong about and still be right?**  
(Eph. 5:11; 1 Jn. 3:4; Mt. 7:23)

**Which Law of Christ can I not know and still be right?**  
(Eph. 3:4; 5:17; Jn. 8:32; Eph. 4:13)

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## 25. The Grace of God

*"Instructs Us" (Titus 2:11-12)*

**"You Don't Preach Enough About Grace"**

We Preach Grace When We:

**Preach Baptism**

**Preach the Church**

**Preach the Structure of the Church**

**Preach the Work of the Church**

**Preach the Worship of the Church**

**Preach About Sin**

**Preach About Man's Need to Obey**



# GRACE ABUSE: UNITY-FELLOWSHIP

## Rocking the Boat

On the last night of his life Jesus prayed a prayer that stands as a citadel for all Christians:

I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. (John 17:20)

How precious are these words. Jesus, knowing the end is near, prays one final time for his followers. Striking, isn't it, that he prayed not for their success, their safety, or their happiness. He prayed for their unity. He prayed that they would love each other.

As he prayed for them, he also prayed for "those who will believe because of their teaching." That means us! In his last prayer Jesus prayed that you and I be one.

## The Command of Acceptance

Of all the lessons we can draw from this verse, don't miss the most important: Unity matters to God. The Father does not want his kids to squabble. Disunity disturbs him. Why? Because "all people will know that you are my followers if you love each other" (John 13:35). Unity creates belief. How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? Not if we agree with each other. Not if we solve every controversy. But if we love one another.

Paul Billheimer may very well be right when he says:

The continuous and widespread fragmentation of the Church has been the scandal of the ages. It has been Satan's master strategy. The sin of disunity probably has caused more souls to be lost than all other sins combined."

"All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other." Stop and think about this verse for a minute. Could it be that *unity* is the key to reaching the world for Christ?

If unity is the key to evangelism, shouldn't it have precedence in our prayers? Shouldn't we, as Paul said, "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3 NIV)? If unity matters to God, then shouldn't unity matter to us? If unity is a priority in heaven, then shouldn't it be a priority on earth?

Nowhere, by the way, are we told to *build* unity. We are told simply to *keep* unity. From God's perspective there is but "one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). Unity does not need to be created; it simply needs to be protected.

How do we do that? How do we make every effort to keep the unity? Does that mean we compromise our convictions? No. But it does mean we look long and hard at the attitudes we carry.

## A Case Study in Capernaum

Unity doesn't begin in examining others but in examining self. For a great example of this, go to a village called Capernaum and enter a small house occupied by Jesus and the disciples. Listen as the Master asks them a question. "What were you arguing about on the road?" (Mark 9:33). The disciples' faces flush, not red with anger but pink with embarrassment. They had argued. About doctrine? No. Over strategy? Not that either. Ethics and values? Sorry. They had argued about which of them was the greatest. Power plays and one-upmanship. Is that where division usually begins? Where jealousy and selfishness are, there will be confusion and every kind of evil. (James 3:16) Do you know where your fights and arguments come from? They come from the selfish desires that wage war within you. (James 4:1)

Remarkable. Jockeying for position in the very presence of Christ. But not as remarkable as Jesus' response to them.

"Whoever *accepts* a child like this in my name *accepts* me. And whoever *accepts* me *accepts* the One who sent me" (Mark 9:37 italics mine).

Jesus felt so strongly about acceptance that he used the word four times in one sentence.

The answer to arguments? Acceptance. The first step to unity? Acceptance. Not agreement, acceptance. Not unanimity, acceptance. Not negotiation, arbitration, or elaboration. Those might come later but only after the first step, acceptance.

Such an answer troubles John. Too simplistic. The Son of Thunder was unacquainted with tolerance. Why, you just don't go around "accepting" people! Fences have to be built. Boundaries are a necessary part of religion. Case in point? John has one.

## The Test of Divergence

"Teacher, we saw someone using your name to force demons out of a person. We told him to stop, because he does not belong to our group" (Mark 9:38).

John has a dilemma. He and the other disciples ran into someone who was doing great work. This man was casting out demons (the very act the disciples had trouble doing in Mark 9:20). He was changing lives. And, what's more, the man was giving the credit to God. He was doing it in the name of Christ.

Everything about him was so right. Right results. Right heart. But there was one problem. He was from the wrong group.

So, the disciples did what any able-bodied religious person would do with someone from the wrong group. “We told him to stop, because he does not belong to our group” (v. 38).

John wants to know if they did the right thing. John’s not cocky; he’s confused. So are many people today. What do you do about good things done in another group? What do you do when you like the fruit but not the orchard?

## Examine the Fruit and the Faith

What do you do when you see great works done by folks of other groups? Not divisive acts, not heretical teachings, but good works that give glory to God? Let’s return to the conversation between Jesus and the disciples.

Before you note what Jesus said to John, note what he didn’t say. Jesus did not say, “John, if the people are nice, they are in.” Generous gestures and benevolent acts are not necessarily a sign of a disciple. Just because a group is distributing toys at Christmas doesn’t mean they are Christians. Just because they are feeding the hungry does not mean they are the honored ones of God. Jesus doesn’t issue a call for blind tolerance.

Nor does he endorse blanket rejection. Look at what Jesus did say: “Don’t stop him, because anyone who uses my name to do powerful things will not easily say evil things about me” (Mark 9:39). Jesus was impressed with the man’s *pure faith* (“...who uses my name”) and his *powerful fruit* (“...to do powerful things”). His answer offers us a crucial lesson on studied tolerance. First, look at the fruit. Is it good? Is it healthy? Is he or she helping or hurting people?

Production is more important than pedigree. The fruit is more important than the name of the orchard. If the person is bearing fruit, be grateful!

But also look at the faith. In whose name is the work done? Jesus was accepting of this man’s work because it was done in the name of Christ.

When the church in Rome was debating whether to eat meat offered to idols, did Paul tell them to start two churches? One for the meat-eaters and one for the non-meat-eaters? No, on the contrary, he urged, “Christ accepted you, so you should accept each other, which will bring glory to God” (Rom. 15:7).

Is God asking us to do anything more than what he has already done? Hasn’t he gone a long way in accepting us? If God can tolerate my mistakes, can’t I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God allows me, with my foibles and failures, to call him Father, shouldn’t I extend the same grace to others? In fact, who can offer grace except those secure in the grip of grace? If God doesn’t demand perfection, should I?

“They are God’s servants,” Paul reminds us, “not yours. They are responsible to him, not to you. Let him tell them whether they are right or wrong. And God is able to make them do as they should” (Rom. 14:4 tlb).

Jesus’ final prayer before the cross was for the unity of his followers. Would he offer a prayer that couldn’t be answered? I don’t think so either.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Lucado, M. (1996). [\*In the grip of grace\*](#) (pp. 160–171). Dallas, TX: Word Pub.

# Drawing a Bead (III)

By Larry Ray Hafley

In this article, we are drawing a bead on a statement that very well could have been written by those affected and infected by the “grace, unity and fellowship” concepts of Carl Ketcherside. First, the statement:

One of the apostle Paul’s great affirmations of faith began, ‘I know whom I have believed.’ His security in his salvation was based not on some set of beliefs nor a system of theology; it was based on a personal relationship. He knew Jesus. It is entirely possible that a person can know all about Christ and not know Him personally. The Christian faith is not so much a religion as a relationship. It is having a personal encounter with Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. This encounter leads one to a personal commitment of his own life to Jesus, accepting Him as Savior and acknowledging Him as Lord.

The quote is from the “First Baptist Messenger.” It was written by Jerry Curry, a Baptist preacher. The Baptists have been making nonsense on the grace-fellowship issue for, “Lo, these many years,” but some of our brethren are about to get even. Look at the statement again. What does it say? In 2 Timothy 1:12 (“ . . . for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day”), Paul did not argue that security is “based not on some set of beliefs nor a system of theology.”

That was not his point, for in the very next verse, Paul said, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of men, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” Wonder if the word “form” would be at least roughly equivalent to “set of beliefs” or “system of theology”?

What would you think if one were to take 2 Timothy 1:13 and say that Paul's security in his salvation was not based on a personal relationship but on a set or form of beliefs? You would respond, "Yes, we must hold fast the form of sound words, but this cannot be separated from our trust or faith in Christ." In other words, both verses go together. Exactly!

All this talk about "commitment to a Person," "a personal encounter," and "knowing Christ personally" is a bunch of pious nothing. What does it mean? What does it say? When it attempts to exclude obedience to the truth or a keeping of a "set of beliefs," it means absolutely nothing. Paul did think, in one of his "great affirmations of faith," that security in salvation was dependent on knowing and continuing in a "set of beliefs." Hear him, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). Try to explain that text with "a personal encounter" that eliminates adherence to a "set of beliefs" to cannot be done. Further, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:4).

But Baptists and the "new unity movement" brethren in the so called free churches should not feel hard at this article or toward me. After all, my security, according to them, is not "based" on a "legalistic" set of beliefs, but on "a personal relationship." So, I can scorn their beliefs and be just as secure as they are as long as I maintain that ever-nebulous, undefined "personal commitment to Jesus." Somehow, though, it does not work out that smoothly.

These brethren who accept the old Baptist views on grace and fellowship in Christ can accept a premillennialist, a Christian Church preacher and his piano, and institutional brethren with their human societies, because they say theirs is a “relationship to Jesus” which is not based on a “set of beliefs.” But they have a hard time following that same reasoning and accepting me. That is not being consistent.

Truth Magazine XXII: 36, p. 578  
September 14, 1978

## **An Appeal in Love to Edward Fudge: Clarify Please (I)**

Ron Halbrook  
Nashville, Tennessee

Anyone who writes and teaches publicly expects, even invites, public examination. The Christian who teaches is “ready always to give an answer,” defense, or apology for his teaching (1Pet. 3:15). Sometimes a brother needs specific occasion to explain himself further (Acts 17:19-20, 32-34). He is glad to add clarification, response, and explanation. Such can dissolve unfounded fears, doubts, or reservations and thus contribute to a healthier relationship (2 Thess. 2:1-2). Such occasions can even result in a stronger presentation of needed truths. Truths which inquirers see but vaguely, standing aloof from them because poorly understood, can be reaffirmed so as to make them stand out in bold relief. “Truth has nothing to fear by investigation; in fact, it is like gold, the more you rub it, the brighter it shines.”

This article is written to give a brother the needed occasion to clarify, to contribute to improved relations, to put to rest any unfounded fears brethren may have, or to reaffirm truths formerly stated which need to be more clearly perceived.

### **Concern and Fairness**

Sometimes inquiries are stated with the wrong motives; response may still be imperative, but the occasion of teaching is thus a sad one (Matt. 19:3; Lk. 10:29). Even when inquirers do not benefit from occasions of clarification, others can benefit (Matt. 19:16-30). The motive behind this present occasion is the purest, if this writer knows his heart at all.

Some brethren are concerned that a brother is drifting from some basic principles of New Testament Christianity. He, in turn, is concerned because they are concerned. For reasons, which we hope to give him occasion to state, he feels the fears of loving brethren are unfounded and ought to be laid to rest. This writer isn't aware of any whispering campaign, desire to misrepresent, ugliness, or intent to hurt on the part of those who are concerned; none of those things characterize this article, nor are they expected in the response our brother may choose to make.

In the interest of fairness, the very first person who will read this article after its completion will be the brother in question; consideration will be given to any suggestion he may have as to the wording of this article. Also, by offering this article to the Gospel Guardian, this writer is assuring the brother's full, free, unfettered opportunity to respond. Our brother's relationship to the Guardian will mean he will have a free hand to say all he wishes on the matters at hand.

## On Judging

Our brother will understand, and all others will need to understand, that nothing in this article makes this writer the final judge of any brother. No mortal can write for anyone the papers of final, eternal destiny. God Himself has appointed both the “day” of final judgment and the “man” through whom it will be meted out (Acts 17:31). Whereas we are not to look upon each other with the attitude of a final judge, we are to look upon each (1) “to stimulate to love and good deeds” (Heb. 10:24), (2) to detect truth and error (1 Jn. 4:6; Acts 20:29-32), (3) to inspect the fruits borne (Matt. 7:20), and (4) to “examine everything carefully,” determined to “hold fast to that which is good” and “abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5:21-22). With these four points in mind, we extend this appeal in love to our brother for consideration, clarification, or whatever response he chooses.

## Why Now, Why At All?

Why is this article offered now and not later? Thoughts lead to actions and concepts to practices. The concept of the immediate return of Christ in Paul’s day could easily have led to cessation of working for temporal needs (2 Thess. 2:2; 3:10-11). Attitudes have consequences.

Brother J. D. Bales points out the danger of one gradually absorbing principles, thoughts, and concepts, which are not in harmony with New Testament Christianity. We all must constantly guard against that danger! But it is especially dangerous when one progresses to the point of “a fundamental split in his outlook. On the one hand he accepts the Bible, but on the other hand he takes positions which, when followed to their logical conclusion, undermine the Bible” (*Modernism: Trojan Horse in the Church*, pp. 55). Bales gives eight examples of such positions. Seven positions which a beloved brother has taken, or else need to be clarified if not taken, are presented and reviewed in this article. These seven positions, “when followed to their logical conclusion, undermine the Bible.” Any brother who tenaciously holds and publicly teaches such positions has advanced beyond the private study stage; he suffers “a fundamental split in his outlook.” He may maintain that ambivalence throughout his life and never follow the wrong road of that split to its sad end; but others will be seriously misled by his erroneous positions.

Brethren who see these very dangers in positions our brother has apparently taken have recently been writing warnings. This includes young and old from all sections of the country; doubtless, there is more to come unless our brother can throw additional, appropriate light on the matter. Where there is drifting and looseness in the realm of thought, concept, attitude, or fundamental principle, especially when reflected in public teaching, warnings are in order before the sad fruit is borne in its maturity.

Let us now notice positions apparently held by our brother, which undermine the Bible. We pray that this may present him occasion to clarify, retract, reaffirm, or contribute whatever thoughts he deems appropriate.



## Faith and Opinion

POINT 1: Our brother apparently has been confused on the subject of faith and opinion for quite some time. He wrote on the subject in "Faith, or Merely Opinion?" It appeared in the Christian Standard on July 8, 1967, Sentinel of Truth in Sept., 1967, Gospel Guardian in modified form on Aug. 28, 1969, and it has been circulated since then.

He gives quotations from the Campbells, F. G. Allen, Isaac Errett, W. T. Moore, and J. S. Lamar, adding his own comments. He concludes by heartily recommending what he understands these men said on faith and opinion; "the principles stated by these men are ... plain . . . Now it is ours to refute them - or put them into practice," he says.

There is controversy as to whether "instrumental music . . . the number of receptacles used in the Lord's Supper, the support of human organizations, the use of social dinners and recreational activities as an aid to evangelism, centralized programs of interchurch activity," are departures "from the pattern" or are matters of "opinion." Our brother says the Campbells would say "matters of 'opinion.'" If a man desired such practices, "these worthy men" would have said, "Practice your freedom." The only limit is that the man "be careful that he not impose his opinions on others . . ."

"These worthy men" further believed "this does not give the objector the right to forbid the other brother's doing" the things listed above because "opinion will not interfere with his salvation." We cannot label such "opinion or practice as sinful" nor preach "repentance and reformation" to the man who engages in such so long as he doesn't urge "it on others as an item of faith." Since such practices are not expressly forbidden nor commanded, we should "allow the largest liberty."

Is our brother's tract on "Instrumental Music" written within the boundary of these premises? As a short treatise on the instrument, the tract is good and cannot include all possible approaches. The conclusion summarizes the approach used: "I do not need to prove any of these things wrong. The man who wants to include them needs to demonstrate that they are right." True. The question is: could our brother in good conscience preach that the instrument is "wrong" and sinful in the absence of authority (\* Ed read this phrase in our July 18, 1973, discussion and said, "No, I could not."), show scripturally "the other brother's" use of it is forbidden (\* He said, "No," to this phrase.), show it will "interfere with . . . salvation" (\*"No," again he said.), and therefore preach "repentance and reformation" to those who use it (\* Again, "No."M) ??? Certainly, such statements are not offered in the present tract. The same question arises concerning other unlawful opinions specified in the introduction to his faith-or-opinion article. If he did a longer tract on the instrument (or the other practices), would he join "these worthy men" in saying, "Practice your freedom"???

REVIEW: We beg our brother to reconsider the realm of lawful expedience versus the realm of unlawful opinion. He confuses the two in his article. Concerning the use of instruments, etc., our brother says we shouldn't require "unity of opinion"-i.e. we must allow brethren to have whatever opinion they wish on such practices. We shouldn't "forbid the other brother's doing" these practices, asserts our brother.

Sin and responsibility for division lie at the door of these who force such practices on the conservative or of those who forbid the liberty of such practices. He thinks these concepts will avoid contention and promote unity; "it is ours to refute them-or put them into practice," he says. He hasn't refuted them (though we shall in this article), so we assume he thinks they should be "put into practice." The result (as we understand his article): we should treat brethren who enter into the realm of unlawful opinion exactly as we do those who enter the realm of lawful expediency.

"The faith" authorizes expedients, as in the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26; 1 Cor. 11). The command to break bread authorizes the use of opinion in deciding upon round or square, wooden or metal, large or small plates for the bread-since it won't float in air. Here is the realm of lawful opinion or expedience (1 Cor. 9:21; 6:12; 10:23). "The number of receptacles used" comes under this head.

There is a realm of unlawful opinion. Putting catsup, mustard, tomato, onion, and grilled hamburger on the bread at the Lord's Table falls in this realm. So do instrumental music, social and recreational activities or centralization in the affairs of the church. All of these practices violate the will and covenant of Christ, violate the silence of scripture, are forbidden additions to God's Word (Acts 15:24; Gal. 1:3; Jude 3).

The brother's position hinges on the fact that instruments, etc., aren't mentioned in the New Testament; not being mentioned, they are not in any sense a matter of faith, he seems to think. To practice what his article asserts is to undermine the Bible. While instruments, etc., are not matters of faith in the sense that the Bible affirms we should use them, they are matters of faith in that they violate Christ's covenant by disregarding its silence and adding to its teaching! This is the old issue of whether God must specifically forbid a thing by name before it is sinful (a matter of faith), or whether God's specific approbation of something (like singing) is also a prohibition of everything else like playing). See Heb. 7:14. Whatever isn't specifically forbidden our brother places in the realm of lawful opinion - seeing sin only when the not-specifically-forbidden thing is forced upon brethren.

Have we misunderstood? Is it time to practice the ideas apparently asserted, or time to refute them? Is it really factious sin to point out to brethren that instruments, recreation, and centralization are violations of the faith as unlawful opinions-that "repentance and reformation" are needed? In so doing, have conservative brethren abused the rightful liberty in Christ of other brethren-as some have protested all along? Have we been pharisees and legalists by so strongly opposing things not specifically-forbidden-by-name? If so, we have sinned and ought to be plainly rebuked; we must immediately push for rapprochement without requiring our brethren to give up their innovations. Dear brother, clarify please.

[*Truth Magazine* XVII: 46, (September 27, 1973) pp. 9-11]

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## Appeal to Edward Fudge(II): Inferences

Ron Halbrook  
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(Editor's Note: An introductory article to this series in which Brother Ron Halbrook is reviewing the position of his dear friend, Brother Edward Fudge, appeared in the Sept. 20th issue. If you have access to that introductory article, but have not yet read it, I suggest you do so before reading this article.)

POINT 2: Our brother shows a fundamental split in outlook by his concept of how the Bible teaches or authorizes. We've already seen how he apparently discusses violations of divine silence and additions to God's Word as though they were lawful opinions and part of our liberty in Christ. He discusses these same practice's (instruments, socializing, centralizing), not only as opinions within the realm of liberty in Christ, but also under the expression "matters of human inference." In this context, he explains we must be careful not to exclude anyone from fellowship because of their weakness of intellect-i.e. they might infer the above practices to be scriptural, we might infer them to be unscriptural, and neither position affects fellowship; see his article on faith and opinion referred to above (in Christian Standard, etc.)

Our brother says that the following statement should be read and "reread," that it embodies "the entire teaching and work" of the Campbells on "unity," and that it "is suitable for all times":

"Although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, maybe truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection ... no such deductions can be made terms of communion (or fellowship)."

Our brother approvingly quotes, "We dare not, therefore, patronize the rejection of God's dear children, because they may not be able to see alike in matters of human inference;" then he quotes, "It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect." "All things not expressly revealed and enjoined in the word of God" are "matters of human inference" (emphasis original). Thus, the instrument, centralizing, and socializing mentioned are "matters of human inference." So, we should not be separated in fellowship just because we "may not be able to see alike" regarding instruments, etc. The user of such inventions should not require the non-user "to see alike nor should the non-user forbid the user. Note the reference to weakness of intellect as the cause of not being able to see alike. (\* Along this line, we discussed what he called our "human system of interpretation," especially as he sees it evidenced in our debates with those embracing institutionalism. I told him it is his duty as a gospel preacher to expose and refute this "human system of interpretation" which he says is so much like that of "the scribes and Pharisees." Once he exposed the false, he could teach us how to handle aright the Word. "No," he said he could not do that. For one thing, he can only offer his own human system of interpretation, he explained. "Mine is only a more scriptural human system of interpretation," he said.

I pointed out that Christ showed us the Bible teaches by necessary implication when he presented such arguments as Matt. 22:31-32; he responded that perhaps Christ knew how to do this, but we don't. I pointed out that Ed has no trouble seeing one can take all the Bible says on primary obedience to the gospel, and thus understand the subject; any change is a sin and forbidden, though the particular change not be specified in the Bible. I asked why the same is not true about understanding worship or organization, with changes being sinful; he said, "It's just not the same!")

REVIEW: Again, we point out that our brother is using a word, which has two meanings without distinguishing between those meanings. The word is "inference." He is confusing "necessary implication" (sometimes called necessary inference) with "differences of opinion on matters of speculation" (or, purely human inferences).

The Bible teaches by direct command (Mk. 16:16), divinely approved example (Acts 20: 7), and necessary implication (Matt. 22:23-33). Whatever God says by necessary implication, we must hear by necessary inference. When God prohibits violating His silence or adding to His Word, we must recognize (or infer) that adding instruments, etc., is just as wrong as adding hamburger trimmings to the Supper-though neither is specifically named as sin. These are inferences we must make if we are to recognize the terms of our Lord's covenant with us! Failing to do so would bury us, in a few years, in an avalanche of human additions, 4 inventions, and traditions; the pure and simple Word of God would be lost in the landslide of human vanities, as the history of the Disciples of Christ denomination demonstrates!

Men sometimes infer when God has not implied. These are the human inferences and speculations, often found in creeds, which the pioneers were fighting (as in the quotes our brother sometimes uses); see Apr. 12, 1973, Gospel Guardian article "God's Revelation Designed to be Understood-III." God says (1) "Go," and men infer a complex system of church centralization; (2) "Preach," and they infer an exclusive hierarchal system; (3) "sing," and they infer everything from tin buckets to philharmonic orchestras; (4) "fellowship," and they infer everything from the smell of coffee to the smell of hot tar going on the roof of a new gym. Creeds are largely formalized inferences on predestination, centralization, etc., which are inventions of human inference in matters where God has not implied. God forbids such opinionating, speculating, violating his covenant, and adding to His Word. Such is not necessarily implied, not within our liberty, not within expediency because not within the law of Christ. Such is the sinful invention of men drifting from Christ as the only Head and from the Bible as the only authority (Jn. 10; Eph. 1:22-23; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Our brother's argument hinges in part on his suggesting God wouldn't cause one to be lost whose intellect was too weak to infer what God implied. True, but the danger is extreme in saying this means necessary implication isn't binding. The next step, on the same premise, is to see that one might be too weak to recognize a divinely approved example, and to set that aside as not binding. Then, one might be too weak to recognize a direct command, so it can be set aside. Thus, the Bible is overturned completely. Our brother won't travel this road to its end in this writer's judgment, but such teaching will surely start others down a path from which there is often no return.

Dear brother, we do not desire to hurt you, but we long for some appropriate explanation or clarification.

### **Underpinnings Cut**

POINT3: The scriptures urge us not to add to, substitute for, or take from the Lord's will, truth, gospel, covenant, and doctrine. We are not to violate divine silence. Some pertinent passages are 1 Cor. 1:10, Gal. 1: 8-9, 2 Jn. 9, Jude 3. Others include Acts 15-24; 1 Cor. 4:6,17; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; 2 Thess. 2:1-2; Heb. 1:13; 7:14; and Rev. 22:18-19. Our brother has been cutting some of these underpinnings which have kept us close to the New Testament pattern and which show it is imperative to continue in that pattern.

He has commented on all the passages in the first list, which is why they are given separately. He thinks none of these passages apply to "doctrinal" issues-like instruments, etc. Numerous times he has written that 1 Cor. 1:10 does not require us to teach the same "doctrine," but only to have "unity of sentiment, of aim, of spirit, of love" (as June 20, 1968 Guardian). 2 Jn. 9 doesn't require us to continue in the teaching Christ gave through his apostles as per Acts 2:42, but only to certain specific teaching about Christ (Vol. 24, No. 37, G.G.). Gal. 1 and Jude 3 apply only to the "gospel" in the limited sense of first principles relative to primary obedience (as in Vol. 21, No. 44, G.G.).

REVIEW: 1 Cor. 1:10. Paul did not write to tell Corinth that (1) it would be "nice" if they could grow into better faith and practice on the name, morals, worship, organization' and doctrine of the church, but (2) until they got around to it, or even if they finally couldn't "see eye to eye" with Paul, they would be "the church of God" anyway. All their goodness or rightness on these or any other matters could not make them merit salvation. Yet the security of the believer and identity of the church is plainly conditioned on faithfulness in such matters. The fact is Paul did not merely appeal for good attitudes in aim, spirit, and love for 16 chapters, though that is certainly interwoven in his appeal. Paul appealed in the name, person, and authority of Christ for the brethren to "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; " then he required unity in faith and practice on such matters as the name, morals, worship, and doctrine. When he concluded with the appeal to "stand fast in the faith," he certainly meant to include all that was presented by divine authority in this' very epistle (16:13); along with this, he showed the importance of attitude, aim, spirit, and love (vs. 14).

2 Jn. 9. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." Certainly John was dealing with a particular error, but it is unfounded assumption to claim he meant no other error violates the doctrine of Christ. Does "the doctrine of Christ" mean only "the doctrine Of Jesus living in the flesh"? An atheist could affirm this and thus have "both the Father and the Son." One objects that the context says "Jesus Christ," meaning the Lord of glory, came and that an atheist wouldn't accept that, then we observe that the Lord of glory holds all authority in his own hands (Eph. 1; Matt. 28). Thus, any practice promoted without authority is in violation of the doctrine that Jesus Christ came in the flesh to live, die, raise, and reign.

The reigning Christ declared his will to inspired men on the subject of worship, and any who persist in changing, adding to, or taking from that will do not recognize Jesus Christ as the Lord of all glory; men must repent of such sin or perish (1 Cor. 11:23, 30; 2 Jn. 9).

“The doctrine of Christ” or “the doctrine of the Lord” is the same as “the right ways of the Lord,” “the faith,” and “the word of God” (Acts 13:5-12). Such doctrine, word, ways, or faith includes all the revelation of God to men, all that distinctly originated in heaven and not of men (1Cor. 11:23; 16:13; Gal. 1: 11-12; 2:11-14). In the very same way, “the doctrine of Balaam” was not simply one particular doctrine about Balaam, but all that he stood for in faith or practice that originated of men and not from heaven;” the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,” was not one particular doctrine about the Nicolaitans, but was all that certain ones stood for that originated of men (Rev. 2:13-14). “The doctrine of Christ” is “all the counsel of God,” “the gospel of the grace of God,” the message of “the kingdom of God,” the faith and word and ways and will and covenant and truth of God, i.e. all the revelation of God to men (Acts 20:24-27; 13:5-12; 1 Cor. 16:13). The point of 2 Jn. 9 is that all men who are not content to dwell therein sever themselves from God. The point of vs. 10 is that as they persist in their progression beyond divine revelation, they are to be recognized, marked, and severed from the fellowship of faithful brethren.

Gal. 1:8-9. All that Paul taught originated in the Lord; this included both matters of primary obedience and matters of worship and organization. He did not receive his teaching “of man ... but by the revelation of Jesus Christ ... For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” To neglect or reject any such divine revelation is to leave the gospel, fall from grace, come under condemnation, and die spiritually (Gal.: 6-12; 2:11-14; 5:4; 1 Cor. 11:23-34). Thus, Paul forbids hearing any other messenger or message in Gal. 1:8-9; that prohibition protects all the counsel or revelation of God, not just some particular segment of it.

Jude 3. Jude likewise points to the necessity of holding inviolate the entire revelation of God. “Ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” If no particular item of “the faith” was dealt with in Jude, “the faith” still would not mean anything less than the total revelation of God. If we identify one or two particular items, we must certainly understand that those few items are a part of “the faith;” but it would be folly to say those few items constitute “the faith” in toto. Jude mentions “turning the grace of God into lasciviousness,” a challenge to the faith.

He also specifies the danger of despising authority-which is challenging divine authority through failing to submit to those who represent that authority. “To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever” (vs. 25). Civil powers, parents, and the inspired men all represent divine authority (Rom. 13; 1:30; Eph. 6:1; 1 Cor. 2:13; 11:23). “The faith” isn’t limited to faith, repentance, and baptism. When men do not recognize the authority of the inspired men in matters pertaining to the work, worship, and organization of the church, they are undermining “the faith.” We must respond to the trumpet call of Jude 3 as we face innovations in the church! Anything for which there is not a thus-saith-the-Lord is not of the faith nor in the faith.

(\*Ed says my review on these passages does not answer the careful exposition of them that he has previously written. In that case, it shouldn't be too difficult for him to show in writing how I have erred. Will he do it? )

The more of these underpinnings our brother cuts, the more it appears that he doesn't believe any scripture forbids us to add, to, substitute for, or take from the Lord's Word concerning his church and related doctrinal matters. If the appearance is correct, the necessary conclusion is: those who centralize, use instruments, etc., are in unity with Christ and should be accepted without question by faithful brethren. If he believes such practices are positively wrong and sinful, let him please clarify and specify exactly what scriptures teach it.

[*Truth Magazine* XVII: 47 (October 4, 1973), pp. 3-7

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### **Appeal to Edward Fudge: (III) Unity: History and Scripture**

Ron Halbrook  
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POINT 4: Our brother's writing on restoration thought which appeared in the 1968-69 Guardian is replete with quotations from H. W. Everest, J. Z. Tyler, Isaac Errett, J. S. Lamar, W. T. Moore, and John S. Sweeney (G.G., Vol. 20, Nos. 8, 39, 41, 43; Vol. 21, Nos. 1,8,9,10,11,12). There is only occasional notice of or quote from the "anti-progressives." The various articles were more than mere historical reports; they included admonitions, based largely on quotations from these men, that we (1) grow more, (2) put emphasis on the right things, (3) avoid unwritten creeds, (4) "restudy (the) entire subject" of "Christian unity," and (5) avoid "slavish uniformity." After some Observations on History, we shall notice specific points-points which undermine Bible authority-which our brother has asserted. We shall consider "Christian Unity-Second Thoughts," What Shall We Emphasize? John Locke or Jesus Christ? and What All Do We Need Authority For?

REVIEW: Observations on History. The brethren quoted thought such things as instruments, church-sponsored recreation, and centralization, along with other additions to God's Word, are matters of lawful opinion, allowable inference, and liberty in Christ-as our brother occasionally noted, without registering disagreement (as Vol. 21, No. 27). These brethren included such practices in "growth," and they thought "Christian unity" wouldn't be disturbed thereby. Effective opposition to such things was considered creation of unwritten creeds, "theological hairsplitting," and "slavish uniformity."

If these brethren were right, then let's fearlessly say so! The Creaths, Tants, Hardings, Sewells, Lipscombs, and a host of others charged the above brethren with drifting from the New Testament pattern, denominationalizing the church, and apologizing for apostasy. If the Creaths, Sewells, etc., were wrong, let's fearlessly say so. We worship at the shrine of no men. Neither list of men formed a Pantheon of gods which we fear to desecrate. And, we're glad to have all the truth they can point out.

Here is the point. The Isaac Errets, etc., are the men who promoted innovation, violation of divine silence, and addition to God's Word. Naturally they interpreted their practices as harmless opinion. Naturally they said such was their liberty. Naturally they thought their liberal movement should not be opposed and should not disturb fellowship. They pitched their tents toward the great city of Denominationalism and soon were camped right in the middle of it. Brother J. W. McGarvey wrote Brother Sewell in later life to admit his attempted middle-of-the-road approach was a failure on the instrument in worship.



It is striking that our brother can write nearly a dozen articles on the restoration effort without a single attempt to report that a great digression and apostasy leading back to denominationalism occurred. How can true restoration history be reported without the great digression receiving emphatic notice? Was there no digression to report - only periodic squabbles over bad attitudes, but no sinful apostasy from the ancient order in the work, worship, and organization of the church??? The digressive "lights" are quoted and reported on as though they maintained the original principle of speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where it is silent. Is it not historically true, whether various positions be analyzed and reviewed or not, that a great failing away occurred just as happened after New Testament times? Those who would learn from history so as not to repeat its mistakes will gain insight into today's sinful apostasy by giving careful attention to yesterday's similar occurrences.

It appears our brother sees much light in the midst of the darkness of digression, in that he constantly quotes the digressives and omits emphasis to the digression. If he is not putting light for darkness, we desire with all our being to learn that he isn't. If he isn't falling victim to the very arguments by which the liberals hoped to foil effective opposition, we must depend on his clarification to learn it. Our interest is not merely historical, but practical, since the modern movement away from the New Testament order uses these same arguments. Our interest is not to brand our brother; we all brand ourselves by the stands we take. Our interest is centered around concern for our brother, and those he teaches, in view of the fact that thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and principles do have consequences. (\* Ed says that when he was in Fla. College, he thought his instructors indicated that books by Tyler, Errett, etc. would give him a balanced view of restoration history; he might have given conservatives more notice if it weren't for this. On the other hand, he said he doesn't subscribe to the view that men like Errett prepared the way for complete overthrow of Bible authority by their teaching; they were a "totally different breed" from those who don't respect Bible authority. Ed doesn't seem to understand that the kind of teaching these men did, and he is doing, does have disastrous consequences!)

"Christian Unity-Second Thoughts. " In G.G., Vol. 20, No. 8, J.Z. Tyler is quoted in asserting it is not "strictly true that the Bible is the basis upon which we are to unite." From this, our brother develops three notable points. (1) Our unity is, strictly speaking, in Christ rather than upon the Bible. (He says in Vol. 21, No. 1, that not "even the plainest New Testament teachings are the basis of unity . . .") (2) Correct understanding does not belong to the subject of our unity in Christ. (3) John 17, 1 Cor. 1:10ff, 2 Jn. 9, and Eph. 4 do not require unity of understanding on any subject.

The Bible is the voice of Christ to us - his word given through his personal ambassadors Un. 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:20; Matt. 16:19; Jn. 10). Surely no one believes the Bible is Christ or Christ is the Bible; they are as distinct as are the Father and the Bible, and as the Spirit and the Bible. But, to talk about being united in Christ rather than upon the Bible sounds like the old, uncertain trumpet call of the denominations: the Man, not the Plan.

To unite upon the Bible is to unite in Christ. When Christ said, "Follow me" and "go thou and preach the kingdom of God," was the hearer expected to obey Christ or his word - which? (Lk. 9:59-69) Imagine the poor fellow trying to decide whether to unite on the Man or the Plan! Imagine him trying to unite with Christ and his disciples by uniting "around Christ and in him"

without uniting on the command Christ gave. Would this be “harmonious variety?” God will judge us through Christ, and Christ will judge us through his words (Acts 17:31; Jn. 12:43). Rejecting his words is equivalent to rejecting him, obeying his word to obeying him, and uniting upon his word to uniting in him.

Now, consider points (2) and (3) above. Christ prayed that his apostles might be both “mine and thine,” be filled with joy and kept from evil, and set apart-“sanctified”-unto God (Jn. 17:10-17). The pressures of the world would be great, but the power of God to reserve and unify His own would be greater. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” The same word of truth, which would reserve and unify His apostles, would be sufficient to preserve and unify all who would believe the Apostles’ preaching. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they may all be one” (vv. 17-21). God’s own are both called and kept, unified and preserved “through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Divine truth understood, believed, and practiced--does belong “to the subject of Christian unity, as such, based on such passages as John 17, 1 Cor. 1:10ff, 2 John 9; 11, or Eph. 4. “

The Corinthians had to understand spiritual gifts in the light of their Giver, purpose, diversity, and endurance (1Cor. 12-14). They had to understand that exalting human wisdom in preacher-worship undermines the gospel (chapt. 1). The relation between Christ’s resurrection and ours had to be understood (chapt. 15). A proper understanding of the Lord’s Supper had to be restored (chapt. 11). Failing to “discern the Lord’s body” would result in “damnation.” “For this cause many are weak and sickly . . . and many sleep” (vv. 27-20). Spiritual death was creeping in where life had been. Some were failing from grace. The “church” would not be “of God” long if they failed to hear, Understand, sorrow, repent, and do works meet for repentance. In this context, Paul appeals for brethren to “speak the same thing”-to remember “my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church” (1. 10; 4:17). The truth Paul taught was “in Christ;- Corinth needed to unite upon it and in him.

In Vol. 21, No. 1, our brother says the “Man versus Plan” idea is “an unscriptural distinction between Christ and His teachings.” He adds, “It is right to emphasize the teaching of the, New Testament Scriptures in dealing with the matter of unity” so long as one doesn’t neglect or overlook “Christ’s role” in unity. But in the same place he does himself recognize the very distinction he disavows. He suggests the Philippian jailor may never have “enjoyed the benefit and blessing of additional instruction” after primary obedience in baptism. That primary obedience “embraced everything that was absolutely essential,” so the jailor could have lived the rest of his life with the man and without one iota of the plan of “additional instruction.” Our Lord never taught such a thing nor authorized us to do it. This Man without the Plan could have resulted in nothing but death (Jn. 15; 1 Pet. 2: 1-2; Matt. 28:20). The plain teachings of the New Testament are the basis of unity, for through them - and only through them - can we maintain our vital relationship with our Savior.’

What Shall We Emphasize? As already noted, Vol. 20, No. 8 and Vol. 21, No. 1 inform us we should not so much emphasize the Bible (New Testament teaching), but should emphasize Christ. In Vol. 21, No. 3, we are told, “Those who led the nineteenth century Reformation in this country” did not place “their emphasis in restoration . . . (on) the Church itself,” but on “Gods Word . . . especially in the beginning of their work, as the all sufficient canon of orthodoxy,

unity, and communion.” After being told to shift our real emphasis from the Bible to Christ. now we are told the importance of shifting our emphasis from the church to the Bible. Not the church, but the Bible; not the Bible, but Christ.

The truth is, when the gospel was preached by inspired men in the 1st century, both the Man and the Plan were preached - with emphasis on the Son of God who gives the Word of God and thus has absolute authority over the People of God in all the affairs of spiritual service. The church and the Bible and the Christ. Our “emphasis in restoration” preaching, i.e. gospel preaching, must be on the absolute authority of the Son, the all-sufficiency of the Word, and the distinctive characteristics of the People of God. Digressives, such as our brother quotes, are forever trying to figure out how to emphasize some part of the gospel without emphasizing all of it; is our brother getting on the merry-go-round with them? Let us all determine, as Paul, to shun not “to declare . . . all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

John Locke or Jesus Christ? In Vol. 21, No. 3, some excellent quotes of pioneer preachers are given. Their plea was “that the Church of Christ . . . should resume that original unity, peace, and purity which belong to its constitution, and constitute its glory” and should “conform to the model and adopt the practice of the primitive Church, expressly exhibited in the New Testament.” They thought the “authority of Scripture” and “the idea of the ancient church as a model for all time ... went together and were a natural pair.”

“ . . . Thomas Campbell assumed that ‘when once the principle of the sufficiency of the divine standard and model-the church of the New Testament-has been accepted, and men begin to inquire in its pages as to what is the will of God concerning his church, they will all at once fall upon the same self-evident truths of faith and practice.’ In this assumption, Campbell was essentially proposing his solution to the problem of disunity among professing Christians. He was suggesting unity by conformity. “

Our brother adds this explanation,

“ . . . Campbell’s reasoning was partly obligated to the idea of ‘natural law,’ and particularly to the philosophy and reasoning methods of John Locke of England. Campbell did not approach the subject of Christian unity from the standpoint ... used with other topics: i.e. to see what the New Testament itself had to say on the topic. He did not ... develop a Biblical theology here. . . . “

(\* I pointed out to Ed that I read the entire set of The Christian Baptist in the past year. His statement that the Campbell’s did not go to “the New Testament itself” to see what it said on “the subject of Christian unity” is totally in error. There are numerous articles in The Christian Baptist, the Campbell’s first magazine, dealing with unity from the New Testament viewpoint. When I told him this, he was, as Martin Luther once said, “silent as the fishes.”)

Locke’s “natural law” theory said man was in “original purity” before civil government began; man was endowed with natural rights, some of which were given up to civil government. He surmised that if government became oppressive, men may dissolve it and take back all their rights. He also said these propositions were “self-evident” and all could see them to be true without benefit of closely reasoned proof.

Two basic points emerge: (1) the concept that man's original state establishes standards, patterns, or norms of conduct, and (2) the concept that these propositions will be self-evident to all who look into the book of human nature.

How is the idea of patterning the church after the Bible model based on Locke's philosophy? Is it because of the emphasis given to the church's original state as our pattern today? There may be a coincidence of ideas, or even an increased interest in the original state of the church under the influence of the widespread interest in the original state of man. One is a spiritual interest, the other political. This won't prove the restoration plea is based on Locke. The plea for men "to conform to the model and adopt the practice of the primitive Church" is based on the headship of Christ, the perfection of the apostolic teaching, and the all-sufficiency of Scripture (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). The work, worship, and organization of the church were among the things, which the Lord himself perpetuated (1 Cor. 4:17; 2 Tim. 2:2; Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5; 1 Tim. 3:15). A return to the original teaching and model of the church, as "expressly exhibited in the New Testament," is the only "solution to the problem of disunity among professing Christians." This is "Biblical theology," not natural law theory. This is not what John Locke had to say, but "what the New Testament itself had(s) to say."

Is the objection that Locke gave the idea of "Self-evident truths"? Locke's idea of self-evidence was apparently based on his inability to produce real evidence for his assumptions and philosophy. The divine model of the church can be understood by all who first learn "the principle of the sufficiency of the divine standard and model." if men learn the all-sufficiency of the divine order, inquire in the Bible "as to what is the will of God," and lay aside human speculation, they will be united in "faith and practice." But, Locke's idea of assumed principles is far removed from the idea of teaching men Biblical principles of divine authority that lead to unity in faith and practice.

Thus, we do not need a new frontier of discovering what the Bible teaches on unity, except in the sense that we should constantly examine what we preach in the light of God's Word. The principle of establishing unity by conforming to God's standard of teaching is valid, has been preached before, and comes from Jesus Christ, not John Locke. (\* I never could get Ed to specify exactly what has been borrowed from Locke. In fact, he told me he wasn't really familiar with Locke's philosophy! I've read this statement on borrowing from Locke from liberal Christian Church writers and wonder if Ed picked it up from them, instead of from a careful comparison of Locke, the Campbells, and Scripture.)

What All Do We Need Authority For? In Vol. 2 1, No. 5, we are told that "everything not authorized in scripture was to be put out of the church," according to pioneer gospel preachers. ". . . their reason for this was that such unauthorized practices" create "disunity," when they are forced on those who object. Such "unauthorized practices" were not considered "condemning in themselves. " So, though "human standards of orthodoxy" were opposed and condemned when they blocked unity, they were not wrong for those who could maintain unity along with their human traditions. Our brother says, "the wrong-unless-authorized concept" later "came to be regarded as a guide for positive action" and "a standard of orthodoxy." Thus, tests of fellowship don't need to be authorized except when they are a problem in blocking unity in a particular situation.

Why do tests of fellowship need to be authorized at any time in the first place? Because only Christ has authority to institute terms of fellowship. Certainly, yielding to those terms does result in unity-unity on the terms of Bible teaching, the teaching of Christ. The institution of such tests is a “positive action” and thus those who act under Christ as Head must have a thus-saith-the-Lord. When the church institutes “positive action” in its work, worship, and organization, it still must act under Christ as Head and therefore have a thus smith-the-Lord. Since Christ has all authority, all religious activity must be approached by asking, “What does Christ say?” When this is done, unity results. When human traditions are embraced, (1) we stand condemned for acting without divine authority (Eph. 1:22; Matt. 28:18), and (2) unity may or may not be disturbed, depending on how many accept the traditions. Not only when alienated brethren are seeking unity, but in all religious activity whatever, the question of authority for what we do is basic.

We appeal in love for our brother’s clarification-not because he is expected to answer every question a person might imagine, but because he has apparently already publicly taught positions, which undermine Bible authority, i.e. Christ’s authority.

[*Truth Magazine* XVII: 48 (October 11, 1973), pp. 5-9]

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### **Appeal to Edward Fudge (IV): “The Same Gospel”?**

Ron Halbrook  
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POINT 5: Our brother’s statement in the Aug. 3, 1972, Guardian is confusing, bewildering, and capable of leading souls into error. If anything ever needed clarifying, this does. Referring to an “Elder” S. N. McCann, our brother wrote, “The author worshipped with people known as German Baptist Brethren. He preached the gospel, the same gospel we hold forth today.” We are not anxious to charge our brother with anything; but we are anxious to learn what in all the world is meant by such a statement from the pen of one devoted to New Testament Christianity. Our brother having put such a statement in print, we plead with him to clarify in print whether he maintains the old gospel-doctrine distinction (or some modified form of it) and whether he really believes it is possible to embrace sectarianism and still preach, “the same gospel we hold forth today.”

REVIEW: Gospel-Doctrine Fallacy? Our brother and many readers are aware that some have taught that men receive saving grace through faith when they are baptized-this being “the gospel.” Then, men study the Bible and reach the conclusions which shape their practices-this being the realm of “doctrine.” The doctrine is not the gospel and the gospel is not the doctrine.

For instance, Carl Ketcherside says, “Not one apostolic letter is a part of the gospel” (Mission Messenger, Vol. 35, No. 6, p. 86; No. 2, p. 20). Within this realm of doctrine, men may embrace and teach premillennialism, use of instruments in worship, sectarian names, social gospel practices, centralization of churches, etc. This does not disturb fellowship with God and so should not disturb fellowship among brethren who accept and brethren who reject such things-unless one group charges sin because of innovation or the other group forces the innovation on brethren. Those following this view deny they are compromisers, because by their definition of “gospel” they have not compromised “the gospel.”

On the basis of this alleged distinction, “Elder” McCann preached “the gospel.” He understood that grace is received through faith as it moves one to baptism. Whatever he believed or taught about sectarian names and practices would not violate this “gospel.” If this distinction is behind our brother’s statement, then doubtless he had the same fallacy in mind in Vol. 21, No. 45 (p. 712); there he referred to “the gospel” which declares “God’s grace” and the “doctrine” which strengthens in faith and hope. At times, our brother seems to recognize that the term “doctrine” may refer to the “gospel,” but in such cases he seems to limit the meaning of both terms to that part of the gospel which involves primary obedience (Vol. 21, No. 44). Apparently-we purposely -use a word of doubt till he clears it up-our brother thinks the word “gospel” always refers to matters of primary obedience as distinguished from “the epistles” which are “another sort of apostolic teaching” (Ibid.).

The Bible does not teach either the strict “gospel-doctrine” distinction of Ketcherside, nor does it consistently limit the word “gospel” to matters of primary obedience. The Bible speaks of the Lord’s will (Matt. 7), his covenant (Heb.), the gospel (Acts, Gal.), the truth (Jn. 8), the faith (Gal., Jude), and the doctrine or teaching (Matt. 7, Acts 2, Rom. 6, 2 Jn. 9, 1, 2 Tim.). Each word has a distinct emphasis (as gospel emphasizes good news and doctrine, a thing taught); yet, all refer to the same scheme of redemption, the same resulting body of material, and the same inspired revelation. Since the gospel is taught, it is doctrine. Since the teaching is good and wonderful in its source, nature, and meaning, it is gospel. There is no more difference between gospel and doctrine than between gospel and truth, the truth and the faith, His covenant and teaching, His will and the faith, etc., etc. The word “doctrine” is definitely used in reference to primary obedience (Acts 13:5-12). When a Christian violates the teaching of “the epistles,” he definitely violates “the gospel” (Gal. 2: 11-14).

We can show the all-sufficiency of scripture by showing (1) Matt.- Jn. emphasizes faith in Christ, (2) Acts emphasizes conversion, and (3) the epistles” emphasize how to grow daily and set the church in order. But, there is no strict division here, and thus no Bible term to indicate an absolute distinction. Each of the three divisions teaches something needed for daily growth and setting churches in order, teaching conversion, and building faith in Christ. No one division is written only for the world as distinguished from another written only for benefit of Christians. Luke and Acts are written from one Christian to another. Every Christian needs repeated study in Matt.-Jn.; this “strengthens him in faith and hope.” Writing to saints, Peter recounted some primary points of the gospel, stirred up the brethren, and told them they would always need such study (2 Pet. 1, 3).

1 Cor. 15 with 1, 2 Thess. link Christ’s resurrection to our glorification; though first written to saints, this material can be very powerful in converting the lost. If a lost man claims allegiance to the Old Law, what is better than Gal., Rom., and Heb. to convert him. Eph. I will help a man confused on predestination, and I Pet. 3 on baptism. To show allegiance to the Pope isn’t allegiance to Christ, Acts 14:23, Phil. 1: 1, 1 Pet. 5:2, and Eph. 1: 22-23 will help. 1 Cor. I and Gal. 5 show joining a denomination can’t please God, can’t be true conversion.

If it were objected that one must correctly enter God’s family, and then needs time to grow in understanding further instruction, we agree. But limiting the meaning of the word “gospel” is not the way to make that point, as the Bible does not so limit the word. Furthermore, those who practice things without a thus-saith-the Lord, or assert the liberty to go beyond the written things, or interpret divine silence as license, are not growing in God’s family, they are going out of it. They are not growing toward Christ, whether the liberalism they promote concerns baptism, worship, or organization; they are going onward and outward from Christ (Un. 10: 4-5; Eph. 1: 22-23; 1 Cor. 4-6; 2 Jn. 9). They need to be told so in love; if they persist without repentance and reformation, they sever fellowship with God and brethren. They are wrapped in a blanket of false security if told they have not violated “the gospel” since it is a very limited term.

If our brother has grown into an understanding of “gospel” that is overlooked in this review, may we respectfully request that he assert and clarify for our benefit.

(\* This is a correction instead of Ed's response; it was made possible by my reading the July, 1973, issue of Carl Ketcherside's Mission Messenger. I wrote the above paragraphs with the understanding that C. K. thought the term doctrine never refers to "the gospel" and that the term gospel does not include all the Lord's doctrine. Since I knew E. F. did sometimes allow the term doctrine to refer to "the gospel," I thought he had somewhat modified C. K.'s view. Instead, I have learned today, -Aug. 23, 1973, that Ketcherside and Fudge hold identical views on this matter. I have been misunderstanding Ketcherside, but Ed has not! Here is what they both believe, from pg. 106 of the M.M. of July, "While all gospel may be correctly classified as doctrine, all doctrine cannot be correctly classified as gospel." That is exactly how Ed uses the terms in the G.G.s referred to above--exactly!)

Preach Gospel, Embrace Sectarianism? As earlier noted, McCann understood faith and baptism. Notice further, he supported sectarianism and led others to embrace a sectarian name; but, our brother says, "he preached the same gospel we hold forth today." If so, the following is also true. He could have accepted instruments and incense in worship, centralization in organization, and socialization in the mission of the church, but "he preached the same gospel." Whether he kept the Sabbath or the Lord's Day, whether he wore religious titles or not, regardless of anything else that falls in the doctrine department, "he preached the same gospel."

Can we be members of sectarian bodies today and "preach the same gospel?" (\* His answer was, "What about our sectarian use of the name Church of Christ?") The truth is that sectarians do not preach the gospel, regardless of what they say on baptism. They may preach part of the faith, covenant, will, gospel, truth, doctrine, but they are not preaching it. If they were, they would be just what the Ethiopian of Acts 8 or the Philippian of Acts 16 was a Christian only without a thought of sectarian names. It still takes sectarian seed to produce a sectarian name. It still takes gospel seed to make a Christian only,

While on the subject, our brother might clarify this. Are sectarian names in the realm of lawful expedients or of unlawful opinions? Faith, or merely opinion? If opinion, which kind? In what realm did brother Paul place the very beginnings of sectarianism (1 Cor. 1, 3; Gal. 5)?

### **Pride Vs. Weakness?**

POINT 6. Our brother published in the Firm Foundation (Vol. 89, No. 22, 23) some studies on Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10). Along with some fine points, he presented a distinction, which is not borne out by scripture. Nadab and Abihu were punished because of irreverent pride, but their brothers sinned later in the chapter and weren't punished because their sin was simply born of human weakness. Concerning Eleazar and Ithamar, we have this explanation, "But their sin grew out of human weakness, not out of haughty will. It involved a false piety, not a flagrant pride." Thus, those who sinned by pride in worship were not forgiven, but punished; those who sinned by human weakness were forgiven.



REVIEW: Apply this concept to our times. If one worships with the instrument that believes it is absolutely wrong and forbidden, and he does it out of pride, he won't be forgiven in the end, but punished. He is really the only one directly rebuked by Lev. 10. One who thinks the instrument is his liberty, who thinks silence is license, who worships with it because of its beautiful and pious tones, will be forgiven. He might multiply such pious vanities, take a pious sectarian name, and steep himself in the pious traditions of the fathers, but all will be forgiven.

If the Bible teaches such, Lev. 10 is not the place. Moses was angry at first in the case of Eleazar and Ithamar. After hearing the explanation, "he was content" (v. 20). If Moses was content, then God's law wasn't broken in the first place. Where was Moses ever content with a bonafide case of sin-regardless of excuses and explanations. Christ did not sin by healing on the Sabbath; it seemed to some that he did, but they were put to silence by his explanation. On Lev. 10: 12-20, Pulpit Commentary says, "It was true that the letter of the Law had been broken, but there was a sufficient cause for it (see Hos. 6:6; Matt. 12:7)." An inspired man like Moses could determine whether an apparent violation was actually allowable in God's sight or not. (This is wholly unlike the "situation ethics" idea of turning every man loose to set aside any and every law of God which blocks some desire he is determined to fulfill.)

In Matt. 12, Christ does not argue that David and the priests actually sinned in what they did, though misguided men might think so. David and the priests are placed by Christ exactly where Moses saw Eleazar and Ithamar to be: among "the guiltless" (Matt. 12:5). In each case, through Moses and Christ, we see no law was broken in God's sight. If law had been broken through misguided piety or pious misunderstanding, a sin offering would have been in order (Lev. 4).

Furthermore, there is no consistent application of the supposed distinction in the rest of the Old Testament. For instance, when David piously moved the ark on a cart and Uzzah piously tried to stabilize it, Uzzah died and David didn't (2 Sam. 6).

The Lev. 10 argument hinges on separating "human weakness" (in the form of false or misguided piety) from "pride." Actually, pride is a human weakness to which we all are subject, just as we're subject to other human weaknesses. See 1 Jn. 2:15-17 for the distinction the Lord does not make in this matter. King Hezekiah showed off his treasures to Babyon's messengers; he fell victim to the weakness of pride, but lived to repent (Isa. 39).

Has our esteemed brother made a distinction God doesn't make? Or, can be clarify?

[*Truth Magazine* XVII: 49 (October 18, 1973), pp. 8-10]

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## Appeal to Edward Fudge (V): Grace: Imputed Obedience?

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(EDITOR'S NOTE: For the Preface to this series of articles, please see the Introductory article in the Sept. 20th issue of Truth Magazine.)

POINT 7. Last, we consider our brother's concept of grace. He is teaching that the work of Christ, in addition to the blood sacrifice, was to obey perfectly for us. Christ is "a representative law-keeper, who justifies others by his obedience." "Because of His obedience, those who are in Him can be saved although they never do achieve perfect obedience themselves." Once we are in Christ, the obedience of Christ is imputed to us rather than sin being imputed to us. "There is a sphere where sin is not imputed to the sinners and that sphere is 'in Christ.'" This is "the righteousness which is by faith" referred to "in Romans 4:6-8" (quotes from G.G., Vol. 21, No. 44). (He wants us to emphasize that he believes imputed obedience is conditioned on true faith.)

REVIEW: Attitudes, principles, and concepts have consequences. Does our brother not see what follows from his premise of imputed obedience? The result is: even if we do violate the silence of God, practice unlawful opinions, and add to God's Word, even if these are actual sins, God will not impute these to us especially in cases of misguided or false piety (as distinguished from flagrant pride). He will rather impute the obedience of Christ to us who are in him. In this fashion, God's grace accepts brethren who use instruments, socialize the church's mission, and centralize. Since God accepts them, so should we.

The foundation is faulty; thus, the conclusion, which results, is unfounded. The Old Law does not cast any shadows concerning our need of one to keep the Law perfectly for us--which obedience would be imputed to us. The Law is replete with shadows concerning our need of a perfect sacrifice a blood sacrifice for removal of sin, upon faith. "The law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them." The Old Law could not save because man did not perfectly obey. (Man's paramount problem was not that he might break the law without knowing it and thus be lost, though the law recognizes a man might break the law and learn of it later. The supreme problem was that once a man broke the law when tempted to choose the wrong. the law couldn't grant final and complete forgiveness. Heb. 10:4.) What solution did God intend: one to obey for us or one to die for us? "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing . . . might come . . . through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:11-14). Which is foreshadowed: one to obey for us or one to die for us? See Heb. 10:1-14.

If the work of Christ was not as "a representative law-keeper who justifies others by His obedience," what is the meaning of his perfect obedience? Our brother says, "Because Of His obedience, those who are in Him can be saved although they never do achieve perfect obedience." If that is not it, what is the meaning of Christ's obedience? In the first place, his death could not be accepted on our behalf if he owed life for his own sins.

Also, notice Heb. 2, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. . . . Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.” Christ “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (4:14-16). The perfect life was lived to make him perfect in sympathy and understanding of our struggle with sin.

And, again, we emphasize the perfect life provided a perfect sacrifice. The perfect priest, “without sin,” did not offer a life-long obedience to be counted in place of our disobedience; he culminated a life of obedience in a perfect sacrifice for our sins, and thus saves us. “Through death” he saves us. See Heb. 5:8-9; 9:28; 10: 12. Yes, his obedience is full of meaning for us.

The idea that God imputes the obedience of Christ to us leads our brother to say, “But there is a sphere where sin is not imputed to the sinners and that sphere is ‘in Christ.’” “So, as long as we’re in Christ, God keeps imputing his obedience to us and so does not impute sin to us. (Again, Ed says this is conditioned on true, continuing faith.) This is a misconstrued allusion to Rom. 4, especially vv. 4-8. God does not impute past sins to those justified by faith. Such is the meaning of Ps. 32, from which Paul quotes, “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” “The Lord imputeth not iniquity,” not in the sense that sin is not imputed in the first place, but in the sense that imputed sin was “forgiven” to one who “acknowledged” and confessed his sin unto God (Ps. 32:1-5). Sin, once forgiven, is not imputed or remembered any longer. So it is in Heb. 8:12, “Their sins . . . will I remember no more.

In the Old system of sacrifice, “there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.” In the New, God doesn’t remember the past sins for which we have sought forgiveness (compare Heb. 8:12 and 10: 3). If we sin again, we may go on in hardness; “there remaineth no more sacrifice” (Heb. 10 - 26). Or, “we may confess our sins , “ ”he is faithful and just to forgive” (1 Jn. 1). We could not confess that which is not imputed to us in the first place. “If we walk in the light” and “if we confess our sins,” the blood of Christ cleanses us. Nowhere is it taught that our sins are not imputed because his obedience is imputed to us.

We emphasize again, the Law did not foreshadow (1) one to perfectly obey for us, so (2) his obedience could be imputed to us, and (3) so our present sins would not be imputed to us. The people were never taught to look on the thousands of lambs as perfectly obedient ones, foreshadowing One who would perfectly obey for us-nor are the other two points just mentioned foreshadowed. The lamb without blemish did emphasize that Christ would be a sinless sacrifice. Every man broke the Law and then stood under the sentence of death (Gal. 3:11-12; Heb. 2:15). They saw in the rivers of blood that sin requires death, and yet that animal blood is insufficient (Heb. 9-10). But the shadows, the sacrifices they offered, served to bring them unto “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” through one perfect sacrifice (Jn. 1, Gal. 3, Heb. 10).

Dear brother, we appeal in love: clarify please.

## **Appeal In Love**

CONCLUSION: Our brother Edward Fudge is loved of many, including his brother Ron Halbrook, who is extending this appeal to him. Love, patience, and a desire to help each other on the way to heaven must characterize us all.

We have tried to present this study in proper balance and perspective. For instance, I recognize temperament may differ according to individual make-up; our concern here is not with temperament, which may vary, but with teaching, which must conform to the divine standard. My own precautions and delays in presenting this material bear witness to my love of Ed. My conviction that Ed needs a specific occasion to clarify some specific matters has finally moved me to write. I cannot desire to hurt him, if I were to do so. Neither do I “throw the baby out with the bathwater; “ I rejoice in every talent Ed has, in his every effort for truth, and in every success of worthy endeavor that is his.

Believing basic principles are crying for attention, I cannot withhold these lines any longer. This appeal is written in love. Ed’s response, reaffirmation, rebuttal, or explanation will be received in love. Even should he deem it best to ignore this appeal, I shall love him still. I believe Ed and Ron are united in believing we must and can strive for the balance of attitude and truth required in 1 Cor. 16:13-14. “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” May God help us both to do exactly that.

(Series Concluded)

[*Truth Magazine* XVII: 50 (October 25, 1973), pp. 3-5]

## **Restoration Summit In Joplin, Missouri**

Mike Willis  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

Through the years, unity meetings have been held on several occasions between those of us who oppose instrumental music in worship and those who have elected to use instrumental music in worship. In recent years, Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett were instrumental in arranging many such meetings in which some of us participated and others of us attended. Generally, those of us who participated in those meetings taught what needed to be taught in such meetings. Our brethren stated that Bible unity can be attained in only one way. Those who use instrumental music in worship, support from the church treasury human institutions (whether they be missionary or benevolent societies, colleges, old folks homes or whatever), participate in the sponsoring church arrangement, or participate in any other unscriptural practice must cease and desist their practice of sin. That message is not much appreciated by people searching for a compromise which permits them to persist in unscriptural activities and to have some kind of unity with brethren who oppose such practices. The result has been that unity meetings do not generally include speakers who will give a clarion call for digressives to repent.

Those of us who have stood opposed to church support of human institutions, church supported recreation, and the sponsoring church arrangement have frequently noticed that some of the liberal churches of Christ are involved in many of the same practices as the conservative Christian Church. We have wondered just how long it would be before these two groups started talking about unity. Those in the liberal churches of Christ could logically object only to instrumental music in worship, and some of their own leading men have made statements which indicated that many of these brethren no longer believe that using instrumental music in worship is a sin.

## Restoration Summit

During the week of 7-9 August 1984, 100 representatives from the liberal churches of Christ and the conservative Christian Churches met in Joplin, Missouri on the campus of the Ozark Bible College for a Restoration Summit. The consultation was held at the suggestion of Alan Cloyd, evangelist and editor of Restoration Leadership Quarterly, and Don DeWelt, publisher of One Body. I have not previously said anything about this Summit inasmuch as I wanted to read what some of those who participated in it would report. Many of the reports have already been published, so we can now make some observations about the event.

Some have objected to who was selected from among our liberal brethren.

We were told in the Restoration Leadership Quarterly, Volume 14, number 1, that fifty of our "finest" men would be participating in this endeavor. One look at the list of men selected, and it soon becomes apparent that our "finest" were anything but our "finest." Many of those named to "represent" us were among the most liberal-minded among us. Many of those listed are well-known for their spirit of compromise. Those selected for this platform of compromise were not selected by Ken Butterworth and John Shaver, and as far as we have been able to ascertain, were not selected by any faithful brethren we know. When selections were made, where were uncompromising men of God like Franklin Camp, Curtis Cates, Roy Deaver, Bobby Duncan, Garland Elkins, Alan Highers, W.A. Holley, Roger Jackson, Wayne Jackson, Robert Taylor, Bert Thomas, Guy N. Woods and Ernest Underwood? These brethren, are some of our "finest!" (The Bible Way [October 1984], p. 2).

Those who did "represent" our liberal brethren included such names as Marvin Phillips, Rubel Shelly, Robert Hooper, Calvin Warpula, and Reuel Lemmons.

Some were quite concerned about the meeting from the beginning. Remembering similar meetings which had been arranged by Christian Church brethren James DeForest Murch and Claude E. Witty beginning in 1938 and the compromising spirit which they sought, some of the more conservative members of the liberal churches were concerned that

a spirit of compromise might characterize this meeting. These brethren remembered that a speech by H. Leo Boles had effectively killed the spirit of compromise at Indianapolis in 1939 and they reproduced his speech for distribution at the Restoration Summit. Here is what brother Guy N. Woods related to have occurred:

Under date of September 5, I wrote brother Alan Cloyd as follows: "The report has come to me that copies of the speech H. Leo Boles delivered at the 'Unity Meeting' in Indianapolis, Indiana, May 3, 1939, later published in both the GOSPEL ADVOCATE and the CHRISTIAN STANDARD, and recently reprinted in tract form by the Getwell Church of Christ, Memphis, Tennessee, were on display at the 'Unity' meeting in Joplin, Missouri, and that they were removed and burned or otherwise destroyed by you. Is this report correct?" To this he responded, "I did in fact remove the tracts in question. They were uninvited materials which were not appreciated. Brother Boles' language is abusive and crude. I did not feel that these tracts would be in the interest of the meeting. . ." (Gospel Advocate [4 October 1984], p. 580).

Brother Woods is reproducing brother Boles' excellent speech in the Gospel Advocate to give it wider distribution.

Shortly after the Summit, glowing reports were published in several periodicals. Sam E. Stone, editor of Christian Standard, writes,

The Joplin meeting marked a major effort to restore communication between the two groups. . . . In announcing the sessions, brother Cloyd explained, "Everyone realizes the restoration movement was not fragmented overnight-its wounds will not be healed overnight. This exciting event will, however, be a noble beginning of a healing process as scores of great thinkers and leaders begin to deal honorably and cordially with the fundamental differences dividing us."

. . . The Joplin meeting represents a major breakthrough in lines that frequently have been drawn between the two fellowships ("Restoration Movement Leaders Meet," Christian Standard f16 September 1984], p.3).

Editor H. Sherwood Evans wrote in The Restoration Herald under the title "Historic Restoration Consultation" (October 1984). He reproduced an article from Frank Brown, minister of the First Christian Church, Carmi, Illinois. Brown was quoted as follows:

Never have I attended a meeting with so much love being shown and so much profitable intellect being expressed. One of the major-and surprising-revelations found out early on in the meeting was that much of our misunderstanding of one another is a matter of semantics. . . .

For three days there was such an expression of love and fellowship that no one would have even suggested anything that would compromise a brother. One speaker said, "I am one of those who fought our fellowship. Please forgive me."

At the conclusion Max Ward Randall was called to the podium by his nephew Dennis, to lead in a closing prayer. Those two men on opposite sides of the instrument issue wept openly during prayer. What an impact it had on me to hear many of the hundred men of both persuasions quietly weep during the prayers, touched by this attempt to express a real love for one another" (p.2).

The 21 October 1984 issue of Christian Standard carried an article by Rubel Shelly entitled "A View From "The Summit. "" He projected his hopes for the future in these words:

Attempts are now being made to set up two meetings in 1985 which will follow the general procedure of the Joplin conference. Within a couple of years, it would be good to hold some sort of national lectureship which could be attended by any and all from either fellowship where communication and study can be broadened.

(2) Meaningful exchange can take place between the two groups of believers. On a national level, we can read each other's books and periodicals-and write for one another. (My personal thanks go to brother Stone for allowing me to write this article for Christian Standard). We can attend each other's lectureships and conventions-and interchange speakers.



On a congregational level, we can establish contact with one another during gospel meetings, VBS, and special activities. It would be wonderful to worship together and to have some pulpit exchange. It is at this point, of course, that the instrument creates a barrier. Some brethren are more willing to suspend the use of a piano or organ in times of joint worship for the sake of those of us who cannot use it in good conscience-just as was done so graciously at Joplin (p.4).

### **Observations**

This seemingly complex issue of unity between those associated with the churches of Christ and the Christian Church has never seemed that complex to me. There are only a few alternatives:

(1) Those associated with the Christian Church must give up the instrument (and anything else not authorized in the Scriptures) and return to the New Testament pattern of worship. This does not mean only giving it up occasionally while working out a compromise at some annual "unity meeting," such as was done in the Murch-Witty meetings and more recently at Joplin (as noted by brother Shelly above). Rather, the sin of unscriptural worship must be repented of and forsaken altogether.

(2) Those of us who are associated with the churches of Christ must quit teaching that the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is sinful.

(3) We must accept a unity in diversity. This view states that each of us will go on teaching and practicing what we believe but will recognize and accept each other as brethren equally acceptable to the Lord.

From my observations, I have not concluded that there is any movement at all by Christian Church brethren to cease and desist the use of mechanical instruments of music in their worship. I have observed that some brethren in the churches of Christ no longer put the issue of the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship on the same level as other things which are sinful (see, for example, Rubel Shelly's book *I Just Want To Be A Christian*, p. 113). Hence, the movement which is being made to make unity possible is coming solely and exclusively from those in the churches of Christ. They are compromising the gospel of Jesus Christ for the sake of unity.

Personally, I resent criticisms of our forefathers in the faith with reference to the division. To imply that the division with the Christian Church occurred just because people in the two groups did not understand or love each other is an insult to both groups. They perfectly well understood each other, but could not walk together because they were not agreed (Amos 3:3). Sound brethren and digressives understood each other as well as they understood people in the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations. Our faithful forefathers simply were as unwilling to compromise what the Bible said about worship for the sake of unity with the Christian Church as they were unwilling to compromise what the Bible said about how to be saved in order to have unity with the Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. They loved the truth more than they loved unity with brethren. Hence, the division was inevitable. One side would not give up the truth, and the other side would not give up the instrument.

I am for unity. Anytime that brethren can work together to promote unity, good can and will be accomplished. The only ground for unity which I am willing to accept is one that rests squarely upon the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jn. 17:17; 2 Jn. 9-11). A unity which ceases opposition to anything unauthorized in the word of God is unacceptable (Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). Unfortunately, some of our brethren are ready to enter the same kind of unity talks as our politicians entered with the North Vietnamese. I suggest to you that the results for brethren will be similar to the results of those peace talks—evil will triumph.

### **What Does The Future Hold?**

I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, so do not misconstrue comments as predictions. They are simply one individual's attempt to assess what is going on among our liberal brethren.

Just as we have been hurt by the influence of the grace-unity movement which is led by Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, so have the liberal brethren. Whereas we have sought to deal with the issue by calling attention to the issues and attention to the men circulating the false doctrines, those in the liberal churches of Christ have done little of this.

Consequently, it is difficult to assess how deeply they will be affected by the grace-unity movement, but it is certain that the atmosphere of liberalism is perfectly suited to the compromising spirit of the grace-unity heresy.

However, one can already detect the beginnings of division in their ranks on the issue. The Gospel Advocate and Firm Foundation are under the control of brethren who win stand against fellowship with those who use instrumental music in their worship. Others, represented in part by Mission Messenger and Integrity, are ready and willing to accept those in the conservative Christian Churches as brethren.

Hence, there will probably be a division in the liberal churches of Christ somewhat similar to what has occurred in the Christian Church, which has divided into at least two branches—the Disciples of Christ and conservative Christian Church/instrumental churches of Christ. Whether or not Joplin turns out to be a watershed, it is at least a straw in the wind. It is the portent of things to come.

We will follow the writings of these brethren, watching with interest. We would be delighted to see progress toward scriptural unity on such matters as worship, institutionalism, and the mission of the church. We will never rejoice in iniquity and we are not glad to see the spirit of apostasy waxing worse and worse. But hopefully some of those who have drifted into liberalism during the last thirty years will be alarmed by this portent of more radical digression and retrace their steps to the solid ground of doing only what is authorized in the word of God.

Guardian of Truth XXVIII: 22, pp. 674, 694-695  
November 15, 1984

## **James W. Adams vs. A New Unity Movement**

Ron Halbrook  
West Columbia, Texas

In the process of reviewing the ecumenical errors of W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, James W. Adams exposed and challenged certain men who were creeping about peddling the same errors among sound brethren. Like the faithful watchman of Ezekiel 3, brother Adams warned brethren against those who were undermining the foundations of the walls of Zion in the very aftermath of the battles fought over the apostasy of institutionalism. Several of these young princes thought themselves to be somewhat and thought their trite theories to be some new thing under the sun. Brother Adams showed keen insight in analyzing their principles, and courage in calling their names - names such as Edward Fudge, Randall Mark Trainer and Gordon Wilson. Persistent and firm in the face of controversy and even persecution, brother Adams proved himself to be "set for the defense of the gospel" just as he had always been before (Phil. 1:17).

Between 15 March 1973 and 22 August 1974, brother Adams reviewed and analyzed the Ketcherside-Garrett unity movement in a series of articles published in Truth Magazine. The first article was entitled "A Stone of Witness" and reflected his resolve to reaffirm the basic fundamentals necessary for the restoration of New Testament Christianity. When he finished, twenty-six articles had been published, twenty-one of them between March and September of 1973. The editor of Truth Magazine at the time, Cecil Willis, quickly realized the value of these articles on the true nature of biblical unity and fellowship, and he began to advertise that one thousand extra copies of each issue containing one of these articles were being printed for distribution.

### **Ecumenical Error Exposed As Extreme, Arbitrary**

Adams observed that men like Ketcherside and Garrett once had occupied such radical extremes in one direction that they could fellowship almost nobody and now had swung to an opposite radical extreme where they could fellowship almost everybody. Even though their application of certain faulty concepts had changed, their character as radical extremists had proven to be constant.

Ketcherside claimed that "one fact and one act" were sufficient grounds for unity and fellowship. The "one fact" is the deity of Christ and the "one act" baptism. Brother Adams pointed out the necessity of faithfulness to God's pattern of truth in all things. If the pattern of truth in regard to worship can be sacrificed so as to permit fellowship with baptized believers worshipping with instruments of music, why not sacrifice the Bible pattern on baptism in order to have fellowship with sprinkled believers? The arbitrary nature of Ketcherside's ecumenical error was exposed.

Ketcherside had much to say about fellowship not meaning endorsement of error, but Adams noted that Ketcherside's fellowship with people in error did constitute endorsement and compromise because he did not cry out against their apostate practices. "Unity in diversity" was a favorite slogan of Ketcherside in teaching that if people have been baptized they can believe or practice almost anything. To the contrary, brother Adams showed that the unity Christ prayed for and Paul preached was based upon the platform and pattern of divine truth. Ketcherside contended that fellowship should be withdrawn only when people explicitly deny the deity of Christ, become openly immoral, or create factions over matters of opinion. Again exposing the arbitrary nature of Ketcherside's ecumenical errors, Adams pointed out that a simple reading of New Testament passages on withdrawing fellowship reveals other grounds for withdrawal.

### **Ecumenical Capitulation to Error and Apostasy**

In explaining the sources of this "Neo-Calvinistic Unity Cult," brother Adams recalled the identical theories of various extremists who had left the faith all through the years. In addition, he noted that various brethren were becoming newly enamoured of denominational concepts concerning love, grace, unity, and fellowship. In other words, the so-called "new" unity movement was nothing but capitulation to the error and apostasy which brethren had always fought against in their efforts to defend the truth of the gospel of Christ. The methods of this "new" movement were shown to be devious and deceitful. "Ketchersidean Subversion" was promoted through advocating an underground operation and avoiding open debate. His followers and admirers were told to work from within by utilizing cell groups, young people (especially intellectual types), and Sunday night visits to various factions for fellowship.

One of the young, intellectual princes enamoured of Ketcherside was Edward Fudge. Fudge's family controlled the Gospel Guardian at that time, which was being edited by William Wallace. One of the saddest and most painful phases of this controversy was occasioned by William Wallace's trying to make accommodations on behalf of Edward Fudge. Edward Fudge's close association with the Gospel Guardian drew that paper into an effort to defend Fudge and led to Wallace's speaking harshly of Adams and Truth Magazine in several editorials. Wallace never really joined the Ketcherside unity movement, but he seemed to waver partly, if not largely, in personal deference to Ed Fudge and the Fudge family who controlled the Gospel Guardian. Later, through the good graces of Theron Bohannon, the Gospel Guardian passed out of the hands of the Fudges and was edited by Adams himself until it combined with Truth Magazine.

### **Adams' Analysis Accurate**

The accuracy of Adams' analysis of the Ketcherside-Garrett-Fudge unity movement can be seen from the fact that he never really was answered by any of these men. Fudge nibbled at the edges by questioning a few incidental points - such as whether he had visited Ketcherside at a certain time - but no real attempt to grapple with the issues raised by Adams ever occurred. One attempt at satirical ridicule was published anonymously by Jerry Phillips in the form of a single issue printing of a parody of Truth Magazine under the name of Faith Magazine (for details see articles by Cecil Willis and myself in the 5 February 1976 Truth Magazine). Copies were mailed to several churches and individuals in January 1974. Its articles, aspersions, cartoons, and innuendos unmercifully lampooned brother Adams along with Cecil Willis. "So persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:12). Brother Adams' defense of the truth had been derided as yellow journalism by his opponents, but their own true color was finally exposed and evidenced.

### **Evaluating Adams' Articles**

Fifteen years have passed since brother Adams began his series. What can we say about the value of his articles as we look back upon them? First, they are perhaps the most thorough survey of the KetchersideGarrett-Fudge unity movement and its implications for New Testament Christianity which has been published. The articles were not answered at the time they were written. They have not been answered since then. They will not be answered now at this late date. The power is not in brother Adams in a personal way, but it is in the truth he was defending and upholding (Jn. 17:17-21; 1 Cor. 1:18-23). That truth stands today as it always has. God ordained that men should preach and uphold the truth, and we should thank brother Adams for the excellent job he did in this battle.

Second, his instincts and insights have proven to be absolutely accurate. For instance, he said,

I am absolutely convinced that Ketcherside, Fudge and others are seeking a middle-ground of some sort, a neutral territory, a no-man's land in the realm of fellowship and unity which is a mirage born of overheated imagination and misguided philanthropy ("Who is a Wise Man?" Truth Magazine, 1 November 1973, pp. 7-9).

He couldn't have been more right! These men and their movement have gone further and further away from the truth in chasing their mirage.

Last, the articles should be judged in the light of brother Adams' original intentions. Did he attain his purpose?

When I began this review a year ago, it was not because I entertained in my mind the idea that I could help or in any way change Brother W. Carl Ketcherside. In fact, I am reasonably certain it amuses him immensely that I should suppose he needs to change. My purpose was to rescue, if possible, a considerable number of gospel preachers (particularly young men just beginning) from active acceptance of and involvement in Brother Carl's concepts and activities. From the beginning, I was not even very optimistic about accomplishing this with reference to some of these young men who were and are deeply steeped in Ketchersidean propaganda. My principal hope was to save young men and other Christians (not preachers) who were not yet involved in this error but who were or might be attracted by the artful deception of such men as W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett ("Afraid of A Good Man?" Truth Magazine, 30 May 1974, pp. 470-71).



Brother Adams' principle hope was certainly realized because brethren were forewarned and awakened to the danger creeping in among them from place to place. In fact his articles encouraged me to publish in Truth Magazine the material I had been preparing for some months on the dangers of what Ed Fudge was teaching privily and publicly.

My first article appeared in the 20 September 1973 issue just five pages after one by brother Adams entitled "How Successful is Ketchersidean Subversion (II)?"

May God bless brother Adams for the good he has done and raise up other men who will be like him "set for the defence of the gospel." Thank you, brother Adam, for your steadfast labors and warm encouragement in the gospel of Christ!

Guardian of Truth XXXI: 23, pp. 718-719  
December 3, 1987

# The Grace-Unity Movement Isn't Dead

By Mike Willis

Well over ten years ago, the Guardian of Truth called attention to the grace-unity movement which was having some influence among us. The doctrine was discussed and several men among us who were propagating it were exposed. Some might think that the movement is dead and will have no more influence among us.

Let me assure you that the grace-unity movement is not dead. Our liberal brethren are fighting a life-and-death battle among themselves over whether or not unity with the Christian Church is possible. Several of their more influential men, including such names as Reuel Lemmons, Rubel Shelly, and others, are advocating a unity-in-diversity with those in the Independent Christian Churches. The movement to fellowship Independent Christian Churches is only a temporary stopping place in route to moving into the mainstream of modern Protestant denominationalism.

Those who have left the moorings of Bible authority have moved further and further into denominationalism. They themselves do not know how far to go and where to stop. For example, Carl Ketcherside began by going to the Christian Churches and not singing with the instrument, because at that time he still believed it was sinful. Before long, he was singing with the instrument and condemning those of us who preached that using mechanical instruments

of music in worship was sinful. As his departure from the word of God progressed, he began writing about denominational people as “brothers in prospect” and now he considers them brethren. A similar journey away from Jesus could be described in Leroy Garrett, Edward Fudge, Bruce Edwards, and many others.

## **Major Tenets of the Grace-Unity Movement**

What are the major tenets of the grace-unity movement?  
Given below are some of them:

1. **Unity-in-Diversity.** The grace-unity movement asserts that the only way unity can be attained and maintained is through unity in diversity. They argue that we can no more think alike than we can look alike. The unity-in-diversity brethren state that we have unity with the Christian Church by recognizing that we are different in our beliefs about using mechanical instruments of music in worship and by accepting each other in spite of this difference.

This kind of unity is not “of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). Paul did not try to maintain a unity-in-diversity with the Judaizers; instead the Judaizers were charged with preaching another gospel (Gal. 1:8-9) and brethren were told to “cast out the bondwoman and her son” (Gal. 4:30). John did not recommend a unity-in-diversity with the Gnostics of his day; instead he charged that they had gone beyond the doctrine of Christ and did not have God (2 Jn. 9-11). Those who were faithful to Christ were commanded not to bid them Godspeed lest they become partakers in their evil deeds.

Yet, the unity-in-diversity brethren tell us to accept those who have corrupted the worship of the Lord's church by introducing mechanical instruments of music in worship. The unity which they preach is a different unity than what is revealed in the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit.

The unity which they preach is a unity which requires those who oppose instrumental music in worship to compromise their convictions. Those who favor using mechanical instruments of music in worship make no changes whatsoever; they continue to use their instruments of music in worship and preach that it is right to use them, although they are not used at some unity forums lest brethren should be alarmed at where the movement is headed. Those who oppose instrumental music in worship are told to quit preaching that a person sins and brings himself into a state of spiritual condemnation when he uses mechanical instruments of music in worship. He must give up his conviction that using mechanical instruments of music in worship is a sin which will cause one to lose his soul.

2. Fellowship Without Endorsement. Recently, we have been treated to several treatises on fellowship which try to distinguish levels of fellowship. One might be in the fellowship of God but not in the fellowship of other saints. We have been told by some of our grace-unity brethren that those in the Christian Church are in fellowship with God but that they cannot join with them in the fellowship of worship (because it would violate their conscience).

Does fellowship imply endorsement? Leroy Garrett says, "No." The Bible says, "Yes." Paul mentioned that James, Cephas, and John "gave to me and Barnabas the right hands

of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9). The “right hands of fellowship” from these leading men indicated that they approved the gospel which Paul was preaching. Yes, the right hands of fellowship meant endorsement. In fact, inviting a Gnostic preacher into one’s home in such a manner as to aid his work and increase his influence resulted in “bidding him Godspeed” and becoming a partaker in his sins (2 Jn. 9-11). The unity-in-diversity brethren are flatly contradicting the word of God when they teach that we can receive those who introduce mechanical instruments of music into the worship of the church without endorsing that which is sinful.

3. Essentials and Non-Essentials. The grace-unity movement unscripturally distinguishes essentials from nonessentials. Everyone of us recognizes that there are essentials and non-essentials in the Bible. Paul placed eating meats sacrificed to idols (Rom. 14-15) in the latter category. Whether or not one decides to marry is placed in that category (1 Cor. 9), as are also whether or not a preacher is supported, meeting in an upper room, etc. However, there are other things which are essential, such as the deity of Christ, the Lordship of Christ, the resurrection, etc.

The grace-unity brethren work to reduce the essentials to a bare minimum. Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside reduce the essentials to seven facts and one act which they call “gospel.” The other items are called “doctrine.” With reference to the “gospel,” all of those brethren who can no more think alike than they can look alike must learn to think alike! Rubel Shelly’s list of essentials is the seven ones of Ephesians 4:4-6; however he quickly points out that using

mechanical instruments of music in worship is not a violation of the seven ones.

Brethren who reduce the “essentials” to a bare minimum are forced to go through the commandments of God and decide which are “essential” and which are “non-essential.” Surely, they would be so kind as to tell the rest of us what criteria is used to distinguish an essential from a non-essential. Their subjective and arbitrary lists are worthless. Is God’s commandment to “flee fornication” an essential or a non-essential? How can we tell? Brethren, I have no desire to join hands with those brethren who put themselves in the position of becoming a judge of the law of God, distinguishing which of God’s commands must be obeyed and which do not have to be obeyed (Jas. 4:11-12).

4. Who Is A Christian. As the grace-unity movement continues its evolution, more and more the question is raised regarding who is a Christian. Leroy Garrett recognizes Christians in all denominations, regardless of whether or not they have been baptized. They may even be modernists, embracing evolution and denying the virgin birth of Jesus! Rubel Shelly says that one is a Christian so long as he is baptized in order to obey God. (The Baptists who deny that baptism is for the remission of sins teach that one is baptized in order to obey God.) The grace-unity movement loosens what God has bound as the conditions for becoming a Christian. The Lord Himself said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk. 16:16).

I will not tell a man that he is saved before and without being baptized. I will not recognize as saved anyone who has not complied with the Lord's conditions. We dare not loose what God has bound (Matt. 16:19; 18:18).

### **How Much Love And Tolerance?**

The grace-unity brethren preach love and tolerance. However, when they speak of those who oppose their unity-in-diversity, they become filled with venom. Those who oppose the unity-in-diversity movement are "close minded," "sectarian," "legalists," "would be popes," etc. Their publications are on the "gutter level," contain "smut," and are "slander sheets." Those who oppose the grace-unity movement are not invited to the unity forums because "they do not have the right attitude" and are "knuckleheads." I continue to marvel that the tolerant are so intolerant of the intolerant! To the preachers of tolerance, I say, "Physician, heal thyself!"

Are ill-will and malice toward those who call for book, chapter and verse tenets of the grace-unity movement? One could draw the conclusion that this was so from reading their journals. When these brethren write about denominational folks, they are described in glowing terms - they are so full of the Spirit, they are scholars, etc.

When speaking of Christians who call for book, chapter and verse authority for everything we do, they systematically attack us with such derogatory terms as “keepers of the orthodoxy,” “watch dogs,” “legalists,” “would-be popes,” etc.

The heart of these brethren is exposed by their words. These brethren have much more in common with the denominations than they do with the Lord’s church. They are bent on reshaping the Lord’s church into a denomination!

## Conclusion

Brethren, beware of these false teachers. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravaging wolves. They preach love and tolerance, but they are full of venom, bitterness, and intolerance. While we continue to oppose the grace-unity movement, let each of us resolve to work for the unity of the Spirit in every way that we can.

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# The Grace-Fellowship Theory (1)

Posted by [Mark Mayberry](#) June 10, 2012

By Wayne Partain

This is one of the doctrines of the New Unity Movement. It is the theory that grace is extended to cover sins of weakness and ignorance, especially doctrinal ignorance, even though such sins are persisted in. Unscriptural definitions are given by the proponents of this theory to several terms such as grace, faith, justification, righteousness, unity, fellowship and imputation. For this reason they often say they are misunderstood or misrepresented. This is inevitable since they are giving unscriptural meanings to Bible terms.

Originally the movement was designed to extend fellowship “to all segments of the Restoration Movement.” This means having fellowship with the Christian Church, the Disciples of Christ and with all those who call themselves churches of Christ, even if they teach premillennialism.

According to this theory, there should be no division over sponsoring churches, church-supported institutions, church sponsored recreation and social activities. But their fellowship has been extended even beyond this and many of the advocates of this theory openly embrace denominationalism.

Yes, it’s a unity movement, but not of the Bible unity as discussed in Ephesians 4:1-6, not the unity Christ prayed for in John 17:21-23, a unity based on the words He received from the Father and delivered to His apostles (John 17:8,14).

It doesn't accomplish Bible unity, but rather more division among churches of Christ. Several congregations have been either taken over or divided by this "unity" movement. It is ironical that some who talk the loudest about grace, unity, love and spirituality, resort to such carnal methods in order to promote their cause. No sectarian movement has ever demonstrated more conniving hypocrisy.

What are its principal doctrines? What are the danger signals? Presented here are a few of the major doctrinal approaches of this movement, and "catch phrases" for which members of the church should be watching. It is imperative that this heresy be detected early and dealt with firmly, lest it divide more congregations or convert them to a form of Calvinism.

One of the basic doctrines of the grace-fellowship theorists is the Calvinistic doctrine that man is born with a sinful nature. This is said to be the source of sins, and the cause of so much ignorance and weakness. This false doctrine emphasizes the inability of man, placing the responsibility for his salvation entirely, or almost entirely, in the hands of God.

It should be understood that there are modified versions of Calvinism. Some would deny believing the doctrine of "total depravity." But if man has a corrupt, sinful nature, then he sins because he cannot help it. So there is no significant difference between "corrupt nature" and "total depravity" so far as the results are concerned. If man has to sin, it doesn't really matter why.

Romans 7:14-17 is perverted to teach that Paul, as a Christian and an apostle, was still, as he wrote this, carnal and in bondage to sin, with no control over his life. They would have us ignore all that Paul says in Romans 6 about crucifying the old man, putting off the body of sin, not letting sin reign in our bodies, etc. In Romans 7 Paul is describing

service under the law (“in the flesh”) and, being a Jew himself, he identifies himself with his people. But some false teachers are more interested in upholding a theory than in analyzing exactly what a text teaches, even though their interpretation does violence to God’s word. Remember the warnings of 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; 2 Peter 3:16; etc.

Also Ephesians 2:3 is made to say “we are by nature the children of wrath,” whereas Paul says “we were.” And the expression “by nature” means “by confirmed practice,” and not, as they would have us believe, “by birth.”

Be on the alert for such expressions as “man, because he is man, sins.” Why teach this? In order to affirm that Christians are characterized by ignorance, weakness and sin; and that we are all brethren in error, ignorant of many of God’s requirements – too weak to do all He says for us to do. Hence, they teach that grace has to cover such sins. In reality according to them, our salvation does not depend on what we know or what we do. This sounds sensible and logical to many humble brethren who are so conscious of their struggle with temptation and sin. But does the Bible teach us, therefore, to have a resigned and tolerant attitude toward sin and error? No, and above all we must remember that the Bible teaches that when we do sin, we are totally responsible. We can’t blame a so-called “corrupt nature” that we supposedly inherited from Adam. And the Bible emphatically teaches that we can and must learn God’s will and follow it.

Do not be deceived by such questions as “Do you know it all?” or “Do you do everything perfectly?” Whether you do or not, that is not the purpose of such questions. This is just another attempt to pull the faithful down to the level of the unfaithful, by encouraging an indifference toward God’s will and the performing of it. Always remember that in the name of “unity” and “fellowship” this movement is designed to destroy respect for scriptural authority.

Be alert for such remarks as “We’re all ignorant of some things.” The immediate reaction of most sincere brethren would be, “Oh, yes, certainly we are.” In so replying we take their bait. Then step by step they lead us to the conclusion that “Yes, after all, I guess we shouldn’t be so hard on our liberal brethren, since we’re all so ignorant and wayward.” Instead of taking the bait, ask the question, “What are these things we’re ignorant of?” We want to learn and make corrections so we’ll please God. But they aren’t the least interested in telling you exactly of what you might be ignorant. They never correct “brethren in error”; they just fellowship them in their error! This is an open attack on the revealed will of God.

Romans 14 teaches us to receive and fellowship each other instead of having contentions and division over such matters as eating certain foods or observing certain days. 1 Corinthians 8 deals with a similar matter involving the individual conscience, and liberty in matters of opinion. We rightly apply this teaching to an individual’s conscience regarding the covering, mixed marriages, the Christian’s relationship to civil government, swearing in a court of law, etc.

But this movement also includes in the category of opinions such things as instrumental music, premillennialism, church-sponsored institutions, societies and social programs. It is absurd to put all these doctrines and practices in the same category as eating or not eating certain foods or observing or not observing certain days (Rom. 14:3,5).

Premillennialism, for example, is based on a fallacious system of Bible interpretation and represents the church as an accident; instrumental music corrupts the worship of the church; and the very nature and function of the church as taught in the Scriptures are perverted by church-sponsored institutions and social programs.

So be on the alert for this misuse of Romans 14.

Romans 6:14 (“ye are not under law, but under grace”) is perverted to teach that we under no law whatsoever, not even the law of Christ, so far as salvation (justification) is concerned. They will admit that we are under Christ’s law so far as sanctification is concerned, but they rule out all law so far as salvation is concerned. This is pure nonsense. The law of Christ is simply the expression of the will of God and Christ tells us repeatedly (Matt. 7:21; 12:50; etc.) that we must do God’s will to be saved.

Quite often brethren make the argument that Paul does not say “the law” in Romans 6:14, that he does not use the definite article, and therefore, refers to law in general. But no argument can be made on the presence or absence of the definite article (see Thayer’s lexicon on “nomos”).

Paul is discussing the law of Moses throughout the Roman letter. Look at Romans 7:4, “ye also were made dead to the law”; were they dead to the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21)? But why teach that we are not under the law of Christ as far as salvation is concerned? For the same reason the denominations have always taught it: to minimize scriptural authority, and to minimize the doctrine of man’s accountability (responsibility) to learn and do God’s will. Calvinism teaches that due to man’s depraved nature, salvation is wholly of grace, and that man is passive in his salvation. So, they feel compelled to set aside the many texts that deal with obedience to Christ’s law.

The charge of “legalism” is hurled at us for teaching that we must obey the gospel and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). They love to call us “Pharisees” and “legalists” who are under law and not under grace,” and accuse us of “perfectionism” and “self-righteousness.” AD such expressions readily identify this movement. Do not be deceived.

## Faith Vs. Works

Remember that these brethren sound a great deal like Baptists. To the extent that you are familiar with Baptist doctrine and sophistry, to that extent you'll be able to recognize these teachers. They teach salvation by faith only. They don't usually like to add the word "only" but they always strongly imply it, and sometimes say it outright. The word "works" is a dirty word with them, because it emphasizes the fact that salvation is conditioned upon learning and doing God's will. You cannot even preach a sermon about obeying the gospel without them accusing you of teaching "salvation by works."

Listen for criticism of "the five steps of obedience." Or someone might even repeat the worn-out expression of modernism, "preach the man and not the plan."

Above all, don't be deceived by their remarks about our "depending on what we do" for salvation. This is another smoke screen. They don't want to just come right out and say that we don't have to obey and do God's will to be saved. So they will come down hard on the "terrible practice" of depending on what we do, rather than depending on Christ. Shouldn't we depend on Christ rather than on ourselves? Yes, but depend on Christ for what? He won't obey the gospel for you. We depend on Christ as our Savior, of course; that is the basis of our salvation. But salvation is conditional; we must accept it by meeting the conditions the Lord lays down.

But the main thing to remember is that there is no way you can express the necessity of obeying, doing and working that will suit them! It is vain to try. This talk of "depending" is just to throw you off balance. They will accept only faith as a condition of salvation, and like other sectarians they're willfully ignorant of the fact that if we preach even one condition (faith), then salvation is conditional.

If we accept the fact that salvation is conditional and if we have any respect at all for what Christ teaches, we will preach all of the conditions set forth in His word.

Romans 11:6 (“if it is by grace, it is no more of works”); Ephesians 2:9 (“not of works, that no man should glory”); 2 Timothy 1:9 (“not according to our works”), and Titus 3:5 (“not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves”), are all perverted to exclude the works that are required of us by Christ and His apostles. Paul is made to say that we are not saved by any kind of works – at all. They would have us believe that all works are excluded so far as salvation is concerned, even the works clearly required of us in the New Testament.

They make Paul and James (2:24) refer to the same works, involving them in a hopeless contradiction, and of course, make Paul contradict himself (see Gal. 5:6; Phil. 2:12; etc.). Let no one deceive you: this charge that is being made against them here is absolutely true! They glibly parrot Paul’s statements about the works that are excluded (works people depend on for salvation instead of obeying the gospel, “works . . . we did” in the past), and array these texts against us with the charge that we are trying to save ourselves by works when we emphasize baptism, attendance, taking the Lord’s Supper, giving, visiting, studying, etc.

Listen carefully for such sectarian statements as: “we are not saved by good works, but unto good works”; “we work because we’re saved, not in order to be saved”; and “all our good works are cancelled by our sins.” Some even go to the extreme of perverting Isaiah 64:6 (“our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment”). Baptists and other sectarians have been making these statements and perverting these passages on “righteousness” and “works” for centuries.

## They Confuse “Basis” With “Condition”

Let no one unsettle you with his confusion on this point. The basis of our salvation is grace (Christ, the cross, the blood, all that God has done and is doing for us). But salvation is conditional. We must accept it, by meeting the conditions or requirements taught in the will of Christ (obey the gospel, do God’s will, study, work). Our obeying is not the basis or procuring cause of our salvation. Of course not. No one thinks that it is. But false teachers constantly attack the importance of obedience by charging that we make it the basis of our salvation; hence, that we are trying to save ourselves as if we thought we did not need the cross of Christ. This is pure sophistry. Don’t be taken in by it. It is gross misrepresentation. Only a fool would say, “I have been baptized and I attend services, so I don’t need Christ.”

But just let these who trouble Israel tell us whether or not we have to do the Father’s will to go to heaven!

(To Be Continued With Next Issue)

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# What About Christian Fellowship?

By Wayne Jackson



Every serious student of the Bible is aware of the emphasis on fellowship within the sacred volume.

At the point of our conversion, we are called into fellowship with God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14). And of course, there is the blessed fellowship that saints enjoy with one another (1 Jn. 1:7).

When the Lord prayed that all of his disciples might be “one,” he implied the warm fellowship that should prevail among them (Jn. 17:20-21). Happily, we later read that the disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and the **fellowship**” (Acts 2:42). Indeed, the “multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32).

There are thus many positive aspects of New Testament fellowship. But there is also a negative side to consider.

## The Negative Side of Fellowship

The Scriptures also approach fellowship from the negative vantage point.

God's child is to have **no fellowship** with the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, he is to reprove them (Eph. 5:11). How can light and darkness, righteousness and iniquity share in the same fellowship (2 Cor. 6:14)?

While it is true that we cannot leave the world and avoid all association with the wicked (1 Cor. 5:10), we must recognize that intimate evil companionships can, and frequently do, corrupt good morals (1 Cor. 15:33).

Accordingly, the biblical teaching regarding fellowship also demands an awareness of the converse postures of **non-fellowship** and **withdrawal of fellowship**.

In the matter of fellowship and particularly in its limitations, there are extremist views (as there are with many subjects). Some see almost no limitations to fellowship, even in the broad realm of "Christendom." They participate spiritually with a variety of religionists with no pangs of conscience whatever.

Others appear to have fellowship with scarcely any except a chosen few with whom they are in agreement in virtually every minute detail.

Surely, the truth lies somewhere between such extremes.

The application of biblical principles relative to fellowship is not always easy. However, there are **general scriptural guidelines** that help us in drawing some reasonable conclusions.

## General Principles of Christian Fellowship

The Scriptures clearly teach that we cannot fellowship, i.e., partake with, people in their sins.

Paul warned Timothy not to be a partaker (**koinoneo** — related to the term rendered “fellowship”) of other men’s sins (1 Tim. 5:22). It is thus always wrong to share in the wickedness of others.

We cannot avoid some association with the people of the world (1 Cor. 5:10). Indeed, such is not even desirable, for without some mingling with our neighbors, how can the leavening influences of Christianity ever be brought to bear upon them (Mt. 13:33; 5:13-16)?

Nevertheless, one cannot join in common **religious observances** with those who are not Christians.

Scripture has circumscribed the sphere of our spiritual fellowship. John says there is no fellowship with God for those who walk in spiritual darkness (1 Jn. 1:6). Moreover, fellowship “with one another” is restricted to those who “walk in the light” (1 Jn. 1:7).

### **To Eat or Not to Eat ... Meats Sacrificed to Idols?**

Did you ever wonder why Paul, within the context of 1 Corinthians 10:14-33, both **allowed** and yet **forbade** the eating of meats sacrificed to idols? Certainly he was not contradicting himself. Rather, he was addressing **two different situations** — different contexts, if you will.

Since there was nothing intrinsically evil in meat that had been offered to an idol (1 Cor. 10:19, 23), there was no sin in eating such, providing it was not offensive to the consumer’s conscience (cf. Rom. 14:23; 1 Cor. 8:7) and as long as it did not create a stumbling block for others (1 Cor. 8:9; 10:23ff).

And so, under the proper conditions, in a **social** setting, a Christian could eat meat that previously had been offered in pagan worship.

However, the child of God was charged not to have fellowship with the heathen in his sacrificial **worship** feasts (1 Cor. 10:18-22), for to do so was to partake of the very essence of paganism.

It might be added that one ought to be very careful about his formal association with non-Christian groups even in contesting moral issues (e.g., abortion, pornography, etc.), lest he give the world the impression that the

differences between the body of Christ and non-biblical sects are trivial. Christians are perfectly capable of opposing evil on their own. This is all God asks of us.

### **Fellowship Limits on Brothers in Christ**

The New Testament also teaches that certain spiritual conditions can require a limitation of fellowship **even within the body of Christ**. The collective teaching of the New Testament regarding church discipline clearly suggests this.

Preliminary to a discussion of the reasons for fellowship limitation, however, two observations need to be made.

First, discipline covers a wide range — from simple teaching to the ultimate withdrawal of fellowship. It may, therefore, be administered incrementally. Or perhaps it would be better to say that fellowship restrictions must be adapted to the needs of the individual.

For example, one person — an impenitent drunkard — may need to be disfellowshipped formally (1 Cor. 5:11). On the other hand, another person with a drinking problem, but who is sincerely struggling to conquer it, may not need withdrawal but may need to be restricted in class teaching or serving in a public capacity.

Discipline, therefore, can take various forms, and most folks understand this.

Second, though the act of withdrawal is a congregational process that is to be consummated in the public assembly of the local church (1 Cor. 5:4), it needs to be recognized as well that non-fellowship can be as wide as fellowship. This means that if we recognize that fellowship can extend past the local congregation, even so non-fellowship **certainly can extend beyond the borders of a local congregation**.

The notion advanced by some, that a rogue brother may not be chastised beyond the boundaries of the local church without another church's autonomy being violated is foreign to the truth. Paul judged the fornicating

brother at Corinth from Ephesus, more than 200 miles away (1 Cor. 5:3; 16:8).

## **Restrictions of Fellowship**

Within the church of the Lord, fellowship may be restricted, to one degree or another, from the following general classes.

### **The rebelliously immoral**

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul clearly states that impenitent immoral persons, e.g., fornicators, drunkards, and extortionists, are worthy of church discipline. Such characters are to be “delivered unto Satan” (1 Cor. 5:5), or “put away” (1 Cor. 5:13), for their own soul’s sake (1 Cor. 5:5), and for the protection of the church (1 Cor. 5:6-7). The church of today is woefully remiss in this duty.

### **Apostates**

Those who “fall away” (Lk. 8:13) or who “depart from the faith” (1 Tim. 4:1) are surely subject to some degree of discipline.

Formal withdrawal of fellowship may not be appropriate for a babe in Christ who almost immediately leaves the faith (such a one may not even understand the significance of the act), but for those who have matured somewhat, and then depart, discipline surely should be exercised (2 Thes. 3:6, 14-15).

### **Teachers of false doctrine**

Inspiration instructs us to “turn away from” those who teach divisive doctrines contrary to apostolic truth (Rom. 16:17). A heretic, after proper admonition, should be rejected (Tit. 3:10).

Hymenaeus and Alexander made “shipwreck of the faith,” and Paul “delivered them unto Satan” (which means he severed fellowship with them — cf. 1 Cor. 5:5) that they might be taught not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

But the problem with this is. How does one determine **which teachings** are significantly erroneous to warrant disciplinary action? When brethren hold opposite viewpoints on various points of Bible interpretation, quite obviously **someone is in error**.

But the question may be: **Is that error of such serious consequence as to be a threat to the eternal welfare of others?**

Let us consider several matters.

## **What Issues Should Cause an Errant Teacher To Be Withdrawn From?**

At the point of the death of a Christian, does his spirit enter into paradise or go directly to heaven?

Good and respectable brethren have differed over this question, and someone is wrong about the matter. But surely it is not an area where a refusal of fellowship must be involved.

Which English translation of the Bible should one use? Though I am personally inclined to the American Standard Version (1901), should I refuse fellowship with one who uses the RSV or NIV — **on that basis alone?** Surely not.

How then shall we decide **when** to limit fellowship due to incorrect teaching? I would like to suggest the following possibilities.

## Possible Criteria for Fellowship Limitation

First of all, one must take a careful look at the **person** advocating the false doctrine. Is that person perhaps new in the faith and simply teaching error out of innocent ignorance? Does he have a gracious attitude that manifests itself in a willingness to discuss the subject and learn?

Or is the person a teacher of considerable experience who ought to know better? Does he persist in his error even after considerate brethren have tried to show him the Lord's way more accurately? These are extremely important considerations.

Second, what are the implications of the teacher's doctrine? May I suggest some areas that I believe should be of concern.

### The nature or character of Deity

Some error reflects upon the nature or character of the Godhead. Those, for instance, who teach the "dispensation" notion that the Jewish rejection of Christ was a **surprise** to God are reflecting upon the foreknowledge of God. This is a woefully dangerous error.

Some have alleged that Christ was initially created by God and that he, therefore, does not possess a divine nature equal to the Father's. This is a heretical concept that undermines the Lord's claims regarding himself.

### Attacks on Scripture

Some error attacks the credibility of the Bible as an infallible revelation from God. There are teachers who allege that the Bible contains contradictions; that there are jars and clashes between the Gospel accounts. Genesis 1 is promoted as mythological. The Bible and the theory of evolution are said to agree on almost all issues, etc.

Doctrines such as these are radical indeed and propagators of them should be neither supported nor commended.

## **Insufficiency of the New Testament**

Any error that undermines the finality of New Testament revelation is worthy of censure.

For example, those who argue for miraculous gifts and continuing revelation for this age are contending for a form of **subjective** religion that ignores the completed, authoritative New Testament. When this is accepted, virtually anything goes in religion.

Should teachers of such ideas be bidden Godspeed? They should not.

## **Corruption of God's plan of salvation**

What shall be said of those who deny the Lord's clear plan of salvation and who obliterate the concept of the distinctiveness of Christ's church?

Some teachers have publicly advocated that Christians should extend fellowship to those "baptized" as infants, to those who have been sprinkled instead of immersed, and to those who endorse the idea of salvation by faith alone.

Others have announced that the "church of Jesus Christ" is but one of many sectarian groups, hence active association ought to prevail across denominational lines.

Shall teachers who propose such ideas be accorded the same status as those who are faithful in their instruction? How can such be?

## **Corruption of Christian worship**

How shall we view those who publicly argue that the New Testament establishes no pattern for acceptable worship?

For them, the Lord's supper may be eaten whenever the notion strikes one, and the use of mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship is a matter of indifference. Shall such teachings be allowed to go unchallenged?



Does the Bible teach that altering God's plan of worship is of serious consequence? Take a good look at Leviticus 10:1-2.

### **Compromising what Christ taught regarding morality**

What should be our posture toward those who, by their anti-biblical ideas, promote, encourage, or, at the very least condone, immoral acts such as adultery? Should the blanket of "toleration" be thrown over them indefinitely?

Let us look carefully at a Bible passage which speaks directly to this point.

In his letter to the church in Thyatira (Rev. 2:18ff), Christ, though commending these brethren for some things, nonetheless said of them, if one may paraphrase somewhat:

"I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess; she teaches and seduces my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time that she should repent, yet she had no inclination to repent of her fornication. Behold, I will throw her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her — into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he who searches the mind and heart: and I will deal with each one of you according to your works."

Concerning this dramatic context, several important things may be noted.

There was, within the church of Thyatira, an influential woman who is called Jezebel. The choice of the epithet, Jezebel, would suggest that she was similar in character and teaching to that ancient queen who corrupted Israel (1 Kgs. 16:29ff; 2 Kgs. 9:30ff).

This prophetess (she doubtless claimed to teach with divine authority) was persistently seducing and teaching the saints to commit fornication and to become involved in pagan rituals.

As wicked as she was, the Lord had given her time to repent, but his patience had been ignored by this evil woman, hence, judgment was imminent.

But here is another matter. Christ had a strong rebuke for the brethren in Thyatira because they continued to tolerate (**apheis** — present tense) her false teaching (Rev. 2:20). Surely, we ought to learn something from this inspired narrative.

What can we learn? Well, this. Just as there were those of the ancient church who, by their misguided teaching promoted adultery, even so, in the modern church there are those who are doing the same thing. By their anti-biblical doctrines regarding divorce and remarriage, they actually encourage men and women to continue in adulterous arrangements.

How long can the church go on tolerating compromising views such as these? The church has been patient with some teachers who advocate the ideas sketched above, yet they show no sign whatever of changing their corrupting views. Should we ignore their corrupting influence forever? Indeed not.

## Limiting Fellowship

It is this writer's strong conviction that **limited fellowship** should be extended to brethren who have drifted into the kinds of error outlined above. But exactly what do I mean when I suggest that fellowship to them must be limited?

In some instances, the local churches with which such people are identified should discipline them and, if necessary, even withdraw fellowship from them. Sadly in most cases, this has not been done. The congregations themselves frequently are led into the errors of these men.

What, though, can be done when a church will not discipline its wayward minister? Here is what can be done — other Christians can apply disciplinary pressure.

Though formal withdrawal of fellowship is principally a congregational matter, since, as we mentioned earlier fellowship extends **further than the local church**, so can **limitation** of fellowship as well.

Consider the following.

### **Limitations of financial support**

One form of fellowship is financial support. When Paul commended the saints at Philippi for their “fellowship in the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:5), he was thanking them for their generous financial help in his ministry (cf. Phil. 4:14-17).

If churches would cease to support teachers who go into error, some of the rogues might be brought to repentance. Certainly, their influence could be curtailed.

### **Alert others of digression**

A form of discipline can be exercised by making the brotherhood aware of the unsound teaching that comes from a man’s pulpit or pen.

Christians have a right to know where a teacher or preacher stands on fundamental issues before they use his services. Some brethren complain about the **gossip journals** that are devoted **exclusively** to muckraking, and justly so.

However, if more responsible brethren would muster the courage to kindly and forcefully chastise erring teachers, there would be no need for vigilantes.

### **Limit the audience**

If schools, churches, and journals would cease to use men who are openly known to advocate **radical ideas** or cause division, some of them would

“get the message.” A preacher with no audience, or a writer with no outlet, is an impotent creature indeed.

## Conclusion

We are making a plea for firm balance within the Christian brotherhood. On the one hand, one should not call for wholesale head-hunting; that is, that we withdraw from every brother with whom we may disagree regarding various points of Bible interpretation. Such a fanatical approach has fragmented the church and made Christianity a reproach before an unbelieving world.

On the other hand, it is equally foolish to shut one's eyes to blatant false teaching that undermines the spiritual and moral foundations of the church. And the various doctrinal aberrations reviewed above do just that.

Let this admonition, therefore, go forth to those of the new-theology / new-morality cults and to those who may be toying with the notion of teaching these novel theories.

The faithful will not let it pass. We love you, and we do not intend to abuse you. But neither will we use you. We will not extend our pulpits or our periodicals to you. We will attempt to stop your influence for evil. And we will continue such pressure until there is repentance, or you pass from our midst.

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1: THE CHRISTIAN GRACES

*Make every effort to  
add to your faith*

**GOODNESS;**

TO GOODNESS,

**KNOWLEDGE;**

TO KNOWLEDGE,

**SELF-CONTROL;**

TO SELF-CONTROL,

**PERSEVERANCE;**

TO PERSEVERANCE,

**GODLINESS;**

TO GODLINESS,

**MUTUAL AFFECTION;**

TO MUTUAL AFFECTION,

**LOVE.**

*~ 2 Peter 1:5-7 ~*

# 1 Peter – The True Grace of God

By Wayne Jackson

•

When Peter concluded his first epistle, he summarized the basic purpose of the narrative. “I have written unto you briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God; stand ye fast therein” (5:12).

The thrust of the book is thus threefold.

1. It contains certain exhortations to godliness.
2. It sets forth the nature of true grace.
3. It urges fidelity to the cause of Christ.

In your margin at the beginning of this book, note: *Purpose of the book — 5:12*. Then list these three points.

As a matter of amplification, let us consider more closely the theme of “true grace,” for it is implied that there might be a false concept of grace.

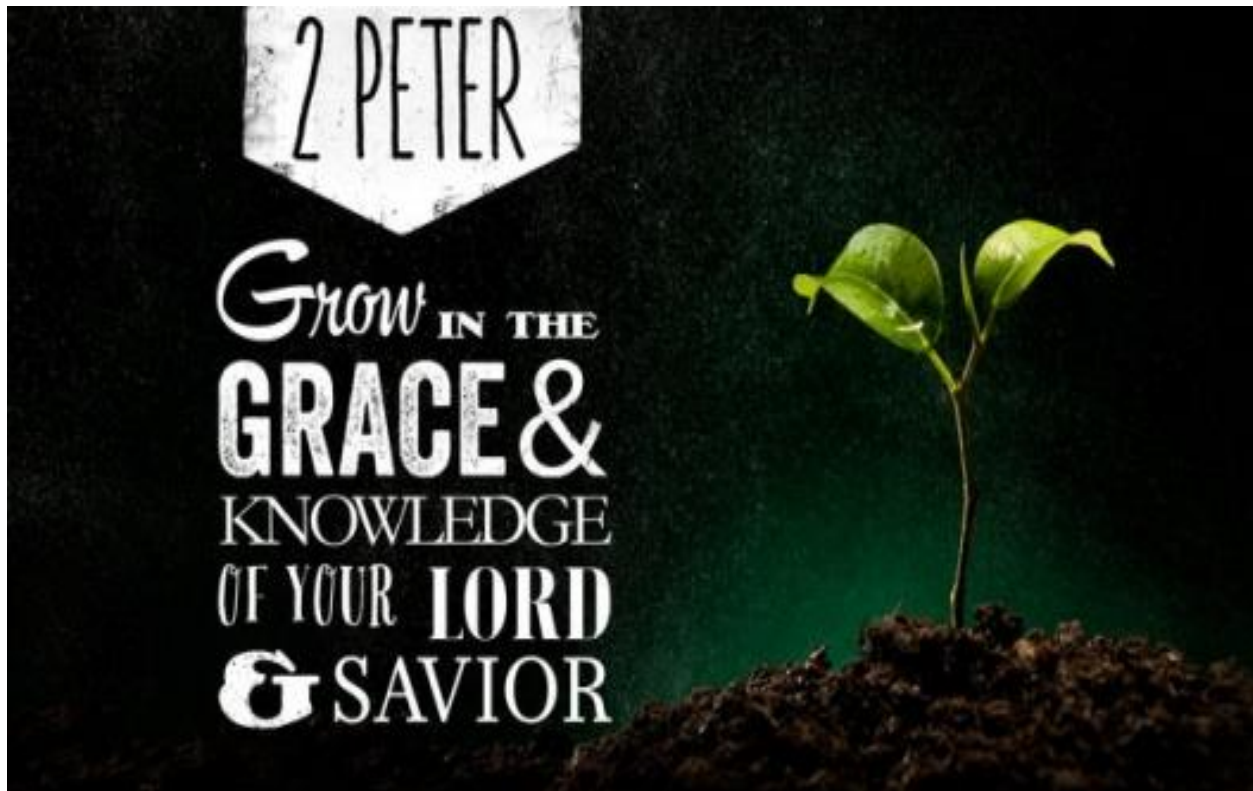
The word *charis* (grace) is found ten times in 1 Peter (twice rendered “acceptable” — 2:19-20, ASV). Here are the facts regarding this important New Testament concept:

1. Grace is from God as a source (4:10; 5:10). It is an expression of divine benevolence.
2. The outpouring of grace was foretold by the Old Testament prophets as they heralded the coming of the Messiah and His mission (1:10).
3. Grace is not bestowed unconditionally; rather, it is given to those who humble themselves in submission to the will of God (5:5).
4. God’s grace is given in manifold ways — in the larger context of salvation (Eph. 2:8-9); also, in a more restricted sense of a spiritual gift (whether natural or, as with some in the first century, miraculous).

Whereas grace is lovingly bestowed, and certainly men do not merit it, there is, nonetheless, a responsibility connected therewith. One must be a good steward of whatever gift of grace he has received (4:10), and continue to stand fast in the overall favor of God (5:12) — the hint being that one can fall therefrom (see Gal. 5:4; Heb. 12:15).

5. Though grace is constantly being supplied to us now, it will have its consummation in the revelation of Christ at the last day (1:13).

Cross-reference these passages in 1 Peter. They give a rich meaning to the expression “true grace” (5:12).



# Growing In The Knowledge Of Jesus Christ

## 2 Peter 1:5-11

### INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson (“**Precious Gifts From God**”), we noticed that a certain “knowledge” is the source of wonderful blessings...

a. Grace and peace is multiplied “in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” - **2 Pe 1:2**

b. All things that pertain to life and godliness are given “through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” - **2 Pe 1:3**

2. Also noted was how Peter closes his epistle with this admonition:

*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*

- **2 Pe 3:18**

3. This raises several questions...

a. What does it mean to “grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”?

b. How can we be sure that we are growing in this “knowledge”?

c. Why is Peter so concerned that we grow in this “knowledge”?

[In **2 Pe 1:5-11**, we find the answers to these questions, and in this lesson we shall examine this passage closely (read). [First, consider...]

### I. WHAT GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST INVOLVES

#### A. THE DEVELOPMENT OF EIGHT GRACES...

1. These “graces” are listed in **2 Pe 1:5-7**

2. Briefly defined...

a. **Faith** is “conviction, strong assurance”

b. **Virtue** is “moral excellence, goodness”

c. **Knowledge** is “correct insight”

d. **Self-control** is “self-discipline”

e. **Perseverance** is “bearing up under trials”

f. **Godliness** is “godly character out of devotion to God”

g. **Brotherly kindness** is “love toward brethren”

h. **Love** is “active goodwill toward those in need”

3. Notice carefully **2 Pe 1:8**

a. We must “abound” in these eight “graces”

b. Only then can it be said that we are “growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ”

4. Therefore it is more than simply increasing our “intellectual” knowledge of Jesus Christ!

a. Though such knowledge has a place, it is just one of the graces necessary

b. Peter is talking about growing in a **full** and **personal** knowledge of Jesus Christ

1) Which comes by developing the “Christ-like” attributes defined above

2) The more we grow in these “graces”, the more we really “know” Jesus (for He is the perfect personification of these “graces”)

5. That it involves more than intellectual knowledge is also evident from the Greek word used for knowledge in **2 Pe 1:2-3, 8**

a. The word is **epignosis** {**ep-ig’-no-sis**}, meaning “to become thoroughly acquainted with, b. Such knowledge comes only as we **demonstrate** these “Christ-like graces” in our lives

#### B. IN CONJUNCTION WITH EACH OTHER...

1. Notice the word “add” (or “supply”) in **2 Pe 1:5**

a. Before each grace mentioned, the word is implied



b. The word in Greek is **epichoregeo** {ep-ee-khor-ayg-eh'-o}

1) "Originally, to found and support a chorus, to lead a choir, to keep in tune"

2) "Then, to supply or provide"

c. This word therefore suggests the idea of "each grace working in harmony with the others to produce an overall effect"

2. Notice also the preposition "to" (or "in") in **2 Pe 1:5-7**

a. This suggests "each grace is to temper and make perfect the grace that goes before it"

b. To illustrate:

1) "to knowledge (add) self-control" - the grace of self-control enables one to apply properly the knowledge one has

2) "to self-control (add) perseverance" - self-control in turn needs the quality of 3. Thus each grace is necessary!

a. They must all be developed in conjunction with each other

b. We cannot be selective and just pick the ones we like and leave others behind

### **C. WITH DILIGENT EFFORT...**

1. Notice the word "diligence" in **2 Pe 1:5,10**

2. It means "earnestness, zeal, sometimes with haste"

3. To grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ requires much effort

4. We do not "accidentally" or "naturally" develop these graces!

5. If we are not careful, we may be like the teacher in the following illustration:

*In his book Folk Psalms of Faith, Ray Stedman tells a story of a woman who had been a school for only one year was hired instead. She went to the principal and asked why. The principal teacher had not improved.*

[We may have been Christians for a number of years. But unless we continue to grow, we are simply repeating the first year over and over again! Is the effort worth it? In the context of this passage Peter gives **three reasons** why we should "give all diligence" to grow in this knowledge of Jesus Christ...]

## **II. WHY WE SHOULD BE GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST**

### **A. FAILURE TO GROW RESULTS IN SPIRITUAL MYOPIA AND AMNESIA... (9)**

1. Our religion is "shortsighted" if we are not growing in this knowledge of Jesus - **2 Pe 1:9a**

a. For what is the ultimate objective of being a Christian?

b. To become like Christ! - cf. **Ro 8:29; Co 3:9-11**

c. As we have seen, this is what it really means to grow in the knowledge of Christ

2. Failure to so grow is an indication that we forgot why we were redeemed by the blood of Christ in the first place! - **2 Pe 1:9b**

a. To have our sins forgiven, yes...

b. But then, that we might present ourselves to God and become what He wants us to be - **like His Son!**

### **B. WE WILL NEVER STUMBLE... (10)**

1. This does not mean we will never sin - **2 Pe 1:10; cf. 1 Jn 1:8,10**

2. The word "stumble" in Greek means "to fall into misery, become wretched; cf. the loss of salvation" (**Thayer**)

3. We will never stumble so as to fall short of our ultimate salvation!

4. But this is true **only** if we are "giving all diligence" to grow in the knowledge of Christ and thereby "making our calling and election sure"

### C. AN ENTRANCE INTO THE EVERLASTING KINGDOM WILL BE ABUNDANTLY SUPPLIED... (11)

1. This “everlasting kingdom” is likely the “heavenly kingdom” referred to by Paul in **2 Ti 4:18**
2. In other words, the ultimate destiny of the redeemed!
3. What is meant by the idea of an “abundant entrance”?
  - a. “You may be able to enter, not as having escaped from a shipwreck, or from fire, but as it were in triumph.” (**Bengel**)
  - b. By possessing the eight graces, we will be able to live victoriously in this life and to joyously anticipate what lies ahead - cf. **2 Ti 4:6-8**

#### CONCLUSION

1. These three reasons should sufficiently motivate us to be diligent in growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ
  2. Give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, by making every effort to add these graces to our lives!
  3. Or have we forgotten that we were purged from our old sins?
    - a. We have, if we are apathetic in our desire to grow in these “graces”!
    - b. If so, we need to repent and pray for forgiveness!
- Are you growing in the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord?

Mark A. Copeland  
Sermons From Second Peter 8

#### GROW IN GRACE

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

— 2 PETER 3:18 NIV

## THE CHRISTIAN GRACES

### "ADD TO YOUR FAITH"

**INTRODUCTION:** God gave to the apostles "all things that pertain to life and godliness" and "exceeding great and precious promises," that through them we "may be partakers of the divine nature." This was God's part. Our part is to give "all diligence" (exert tremendous effort) to "add to [our] faith" seven spiritual characteristics, or "Christian graces," as they are commonly called (2 Peter 1:1-7). But, before we look at the things we are to add to our faith, let us consider the nature of that faith to which we are to add them. In this lesson, we will consider the "faith" to which we are to add these seven characteristics.

#### FAITH ITSELF

A. That without which "it is impossible to please" God (Heb. 11:6).

1. Believing "that He is."
2. Believing "that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."
3. If we really believe these things, we "diligently seek Him."

B. That which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1)

1. Things hoped for (Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Pet. 1:3; Titus 1:2; Rev. 2:10; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).
2. Things not seen ["We saw thee not...."]

C. That which "comes by hearing...the word of God" (Rom. 10:14-17; 1:16,17)

D. Not mere credulity ["a too great readiness to believe"] (Acts 17:11).

#### ADDING TO THAT FAITH

A. The faith that has nothing added to it is insufficient (Matt. 10:32,33; James 2:14-19; John 12:42,43).

B. The faith that avails is "working faith" (James 2:20-26; Gal. 5:6).

C. "Mere belief" must grow into "trusting obedience" (Eccl. 12:13,14; Acts 10:34,35; Rom. 1:5; 6:16,17; 16:25,26).

### **THAT FAITH IN ACTION**

A. Abel "offered" by faith (Heb. 11:4).

B. Noah "prepared an ark" by faith (Heb. 11:7).

C. Abraham "went out," "sojourned in the land of promise," and "offered up Isaac" by faith (Heb. 11:8-10,17-19).

D. Other O.T. saints added to their faith (Heb. 11:32-40).

E. The apostles believed, and, therefore, spoke (2 Cor. 4:13)

F. First century converts obeyed by faith (Acts 2:38-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-32).

**CONCLUSION:** If your faith has never become trusting obedience, then you are yet an alien sinner, outside the church, and still in your sins. If your faith has ceased to be trusting obedience, you have not been "giving all diligence" to add to it, and yours is not a "working faith."

### **"ADD TO YOUR FAITH VIRTUE"**

**INTRODUCTION:** If we would be "partakers of the divine nature," we must not only have escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust, but we must give diligence ("exert tremendous effort") to add to our faith seven spiritual characteristics, or graces, the first of which is "virtue." But what is "virtue"? While the word "virtue" may sometimes mean "moral excellence," that meaning hardly seems to fit, here. "Virtue" is here distinguished from such characteristics as "godliness," "brotherly kindness" and "charity." But "moral excellence" would doubtless include these characteristics. On the other hand, there are good and sufficient reasons for understanding the word to mean "moral courage." First, the Greek word translated "virtue" is derived from "ares," a military term given by the Greeks, as a personal name, to their god of war, suggesting the concept of courage. Second, the English word, "virtue," was derived from the Latin "virtus," meaning "manhood," which also suggests courage. Third, it seems natural that, in a list of spiritual traits, moral courage would immediately follow faith (1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:10-

17). Fourth, moral courage is surely the basic quality of Christian manhood, for, unless one has the courage of his convictions, he will not act on them.

### **DEMANDS FOR VIRTUE**

- A. Fearing God (Matt. 10:28)
- B. Confessing Christ (Matt. 10:32,33)
- C. Withstanding temptation (1 Peter 5:8,9)
- D. Confessing our sins (James 5:16)
- E. Rebuking sin (Luke 17:3)
- F. Giving a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15)
- G. Contending for the faith (Jude 3)
- H. Living godly (2 Tim. 3:12)

### **EXAMPLES OF VIRTUE**

- A. Moses (Heb. 11:24-27)
- B. Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego (Dan. 3:16-18)
- C. Daniel (Dan. 6:1-10)
- D. Stephen (Acts 6:8-12; 7:51-53)
- E. Paul (Acts 20:18-24; 21:10-13)

### **RESULTS OF VIRTUE**

- A. Others will see that we are sincere. Illustration: "Our pottery is sincere" (i.e., "without wax"--wax melts when it gets hot)
- B. We will be "faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10).

**CONCLUSION:** Let us have the courage to do what God would have us to do, regardless of the physical consequences we may face (Phil. 1:27,28).

## "ADD...TO VIRTUE KNOWLEDGE"

**INTRODUCTION:** In order to continue being "partakers of the divine nature," we must not only add virtue to faith, but we must also add knowledge to virtue. This, too, requires "giving all diligence," or putting forth tremendous effort. But what do we mean by "knowledge"? We mean an awareness of facts (Acts 4:13), a comprehension of facts (Eph. 3:1-4,14-19; 5:17), and practical wisdom in applying these facts (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9,10; 4:5,6).

### IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

- A. Ignorance begets error (Matt. 22:29).
- B. Zeal without knowledge leads to self-righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3).
- C. Israel was destroyed for a lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6).

### BENEFITS OF KNOWLEDGE

- A. Conviction of sin (Heb. 4:12; Acts 2:37)
- B. Defense against temptation (Matt. 4:1-10)
- C. Doctrinal stability (2 Tim. 3:16-4:4)
- D. Stronger faith (Rom. 10:17)

### HOW TO ADD KNOWLEDGE

- A. Not simply by learning (2 Tim. 3:7)
- B. A love of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12).
- C. A seeking to know the truth (John 8:32; Acts 17:11).
- D. A desire to obey the truth (John 7:14-17)
- E. An investigative spirit - "perspiration not inspiration" (2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:11-14). Tools, such as the following, will be helpful:

1. Cross-references and marginal notes in your current Bible
2. A good study Bible without a denominational slant
3. Word studies (such as Vine's)
4. Bible dictionaries (such as Smith's)
5. Bible commentaries

F. Meditation [mental industry] (Psalm 1:1-3).

**CONCLUSION:** Do you appreciate the importance of knowledge? Do you want the benefits of knowledge? Are you "giving all diligence" to add it?

## "ADD...TO KNOWLEDGE TEMPERANCE"

**INTRODUCTION:** In order to be "partakers of the divine nature," we must add temperance to knowledge. The Greek word means "strength," and refers to the mastery over self, or "self control." It is not merely controlling self, but controlling self as directed by the word of God. It involves both moderation and abstinence, but also involves much more. "The various powers bestowed by God upon man are capable of abuse; the right use demands the controlling power of the will" (Vine's, p. 1137). The demands of righteousness require self-control as the proper response thereto (Acts 24:25). Knowledge is logically prior to self-control, because "the right use" of "the various powers bestowed by God upon man" depends upon our ability "to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:11-14). However, "knowledge puffs up" (1 Cor. 8:1), so self-control must be added.

### THE NEED FOR TEMPERANCE

- A. It is possible, however, for this "controlling power" to be impaired or usurped by:
1. Emotions (anger, fear, hatred, shame, grief, loneliness, worry, etc.)
  2. Social pressure (from family and/or peers)
  3. Habit-forming drugs (tobacco, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, etc.)

4. Desires (food, intimacy, money, job and/or political advancement, etc.)
5. Bad habits involving the tongue (lying, cursing, offending, gossiping)

B. If we are to maintain self-control, therefore, we must strengthen the "power of the will."

1. This is done by determination, or "giving all diligence" (1 Cor. 9:24ff).
2. Each athletic contestant knows that only one person can win each event.
3. When Paul says, "So run, that ye may obtain," he seems to be implying that we ought to live our lives as if only one person were going to make it to heaven.
4. Wouldn't this result in a great deal more diligence on the part of every person?

## **THE STRUGGLE FOR TEMPERANCE**

A. It is a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit.

1. The fleshly desires simply cry out for fulfillment; the Spirit tells us how these desires may legitimately be fulfilled (Gal. 5:16-23).
2. The law in our members tells us to do the very thing that the law of God tells us not to do (Rom. 7:7-24).

B. Victory is in Jesus, and in him, alone.

1. We will never master our desires without surrendering to Jesus by doing what the Holy Spirit reveals (Rom. 7:25; 8:1-4)
2. Christ lives in me if, and only if, I am living "by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20; cf. Jude 3).
3. One must be baptized into Christ, in order to live in Him (Rom. 6:3-6,12-19).



## MANIFESTATIONS OF TEMPERANCE

- A. Are we keeping our emotions and drives in check? (Eph. 4:26; James 1:19,20; Matt. 5:27,28)
- B. Do we put God first in our lives, even before family and friends? (Matt. 10:28,32-39)
- C. Are we keeping even legitimate drug use to a minimum? (1 Tim. 5:23)
- D. Do we love people and use money or vice versa? (1 Tim. 6:10,17-19)
- E. Are we replacing harmful habits with productive ones (1 Cor. 6:12; 16:15)?
- F. Are we careful to fulfill our desires within the parameters of God's will? (1 John 2:15-17; Heb. 13:4; 1 Peter 2:2)
- G. Do we bridle our tongues (James 1:26)? How well we do this is the "acid test" of self-control, because "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (James 3:2). [An "acid test" is a thorough test to find out the real quality of some person or thing.]

**CONCLUSION:** You cannot hope to "glorify God in your body" (1 Cor. 6:19,20) without exercising self-control. Who or what controls you?

## "ADD...TO TEMPERANCE PATIENCE"

**INTRODUCTION:** If we would continue being "partakers of the divine nature, we must add patience to faith, virtue, knowledge and temperance. But what is "patience"? Some seem to think that "patience" simply means "waiting." That this is not true is seen in the translation, "patient waiting" (2 Thess. 3:5). Thus, it is a certain kind of waiting. But what kind of waiting is it? It is a waiting motivated by hope (1 Thess. 1:2,3). The word literally means, "an abiding under" (Vine's, p. 849). It is "the characteristic of a man who is unswerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings" (Thayer, p. 644). Or, as Bill Hall has said, it is "keeping on keeping on!" Virtue, or "moral courage," must precede patience, as it is the proper state of mind regarding potential threats to our faith (James 1:2). Knowledge, especially that "the trying of your faith worketh patience," must precede patience, for without this information, one would be

intellectually unprepared for trials (James 1:3). Temperance, or self-control, enables us to give diligence.

## **POTENTIAL THREATS TO OUR FAITH**

A. Reproaches (1 Peter 4:14-16)

B. Weariness (Gal. 6:6-9)

C. Temptation (James 1:12-15)

D. Tribulation and persecution (Matthew 13:20,21)

E. Distractions (Luke 8:14)

F. Overconfidence (1 Cor. 10:12)

G. Since you already know that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12), there is no reason why you should not be prepared for adverse situations ("forewarned is forearmed").

## **THE TWOFOLD ASPECT OF PATIENCE**

A. It "may be passive"--meaning "endurance," or "active"--meaning "persistence, perseverance" (Vine's, pp. 849-50).

B. It is endurance, when alluding to Satan's attempts to "devour" (1 Peter 5:8,9), and persistence, when referring to "abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR PATIENCE (1 Peter 1:13)**

A. "Gird up the loins of your mind." This is mental preparation. But with what are we to gird the loins of our mind? What will help us the most, in our mental preparation? Paul tells us, "Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth" (Eph. 6:14). This requires at least four things:

1. A love of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12)
2. A seeking to know the truth (John 8:32; Acts 17:11)
3. A desire to obey the truth (John 7:14-17)

4. An investigative spirit (2 Tim. 2:15).
5. As we learn the truth of God, and apply it to our lives, we are preparing for adversity.

B. "Be sober." This means we must have a calm and collected spirit, which is especially needed in the face of adversity. But to be sober in the face of adversity, we must have the proper attitude toward adversity in the first place (James 1:2,3; 1 Cor. 10:13). This is moral courage.

C. "Hope to the end." This means, having made mental preparation, and having maintained a calm and collected spirit, we are to persist and endure.

D. Patience demands, and results from, the exercise of self-control.

1. If we want to be able to deal with potential threats, we must be in the habit of doing what is right before these threats become real.

2. This means we must have enough self-control to establish a routine that incorporates all of our responsibilities (ex.: football practice). Good habits are as hard to break as bad habits.

**CONCLUSION:** Could the writer of the book of Hebrews have written to us that which he wrote to the saints in Jerusalem (6:8-12)? Would he, by inspiration, have that same confidence in us? Are we "giving all diligence" to add to our temperance patience? If we are not, why are we not?

## "ADD...TO PATIENCE GODLINESS"

**INTRODUCTION:** If we want to continue being "partakers of the divine nature," we must add to our perseverance godliness. The word for "godliness" signifies "that piety, which, characterized by a Godward attitude, does that which is well-pleasing to Him" (Vine's, p. 502). Godliness may be possessed by the unsaved, as well as the saved, for it is the adjective form of this word that Luke uses to describe the unsaved Cornelius as "a devout man" (Acts 10:1,2). Thus, godliness alone will not get one into heaven, though one cannot get into heaven without it.

## **NOT MERELY GOOD CONDUCT**

- A. One's motive for his conduct may be improper (1 Tim. 6:3-5).
- B. A mere "form of godliness" is insufficient (2 Tim. 3:5; Mt. 23:14,27,28).

## **AN ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD**

- A. A constant sense of being "before God" (Acts 10:33; 23:1)
- B. A constant sense of being "with God" (Gen. 5:24; 6:9; Micah 6:8).
- C. That attitude which prays, "Be with me, Lord! No other gift or blessing Thou couldst bestow could with this one compare--A constant sense of Thy abiding presence. Where'er I am, to feel that Thou art near."

## **WILL PRODUCE GOOD CONDUCT**

- A. Conduct, which necessarily glorifies God (1 Cor. 10:31).
- B. Godliness will be manifested in our:
  - 1. Eating (1 Cor. 6:12,13)
  - 2. Dress (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3,4)
  - 3. Service to both God and man (Col. 3:22-24)
  - 4. Dealings with the lost (1 Peter 2:12)
  - 5. Relation to civil government (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1)
  - 6. Recreation (1 Tim. 4:7,8; 1 John 2:15-17)
  - 7. Thoughts (Phil. 4:8)

## **WILL BOTH COST AND REWARD**

- A. Persecution (2 Tim. 3:12; Matt. 5:11,12)
- B. Deliverance from temptation (2 Peter 2:9; 1 Cor. 10:13)
- C. When coupled with contentment, "great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6-8)

D. Life that now is, and that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:7,8; Mark 10:28-30)

**CONCLUSION:** Do you possess that attitude of nearness to God, which displays itself in proper conduct in every aspect of your life? Without such, you cannot continue to be a partaker of the divine nature!

## "ADD...TO GODLINESS BROTHERLY KINDNESS"

**INTRODUCTION:** In order to continue being "partakers of the divine nature," we must also add to our faith "brotherly kindness." The Greek word, *philadelphia*, is also translated "brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1), and "love of the brethren" (1 Peter 1:22). Its verb form is translated "love as brethren" (1 Peter 3:8). This is "the fraternal or family affection the Christian has for his fellow Christians. It is the love that recognizes the difference between the church and the world, between the followers of Christ and of the devil" (James M. Tolle, The Christian Graces, p. 57).

### **NOT RESPECTING PERSONS**

A. We should not limit acts of kindness to:

1. Those in our own age group
2. Those with our personality type
3. Those with outside interests similar to ours
4. Those with similar economic backgrounds to ours
5. Those with similar educational backgrounds to ours
6. Those with similar religious backgrounds to ours

B. These things are relatively unimportant. Overemphasizing them constitutes respect of persons (James 2:1-9).

### **STRESSING SPIRITUAL COMMONALITIES**

A. Common faith (2 Peter 1:1)

- B. Common blessings (Eph. 1:3-14)
- C. Common hope (1 Peter 1:3,4)
- D. Common Benefactor (1 John 3:1)
- E. Common salvation (Jude 3)
- F. Common Savior (Eph. 5:23)
- G. Common love for the Lord (1 Peter 1:8)
- H. Common problems (2 Tim. 3:12)

### **DEMONSTRATING DISCIPLESHIP**

- A. Speaking kindly one to another (Eph. 4:31; Col. 4:6)
- B. Returning good for evil (1 Peter 3:8,9)
- C. Respecting the conscience of others (Rom. 14:13,21; 1 Cor. 8:9,13)
- D. Preferring one another (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3,4)
- E. Assisting one another when in need (Rom. 12:13; Gal. 6:2)
- F. Sharing one another's grief (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:24-26)
- G. Restoring the erring (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19,20)
- H. Following the "golden rule" (Matt. 7:12)

**CONCLUSION:** Do you have this fraternal affection for brethren? Do you demonstrate it in these and similar acts? (See Matt. 25:31-46)

### **"ADD...TO BROTHERLY KINDNESS CHARITY"**

**INTRODUCTION:** The last, but certainly not the least, quality (or grace) to be added by the Christian to his faith, in order to be a partaker of the divine nature, is "charity," or love. Charity is benevolence, though charity will certainly lead one to practice benevolence. The Greek word, used "to describe the attitude of God toward His Son, the human race, generally, and to such

as believe on the Lord Jesus, particularly." It is used "to express the essential nature of God." It "is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor...spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered." Rather, it "seeks the welfare of all" (Vine's pp. 702,03).

### **ESSENTIALITY OF LOVE**

- A. Life without love is futile (1 Cor. 13:1-3).
- B. Love has a character all its own (1 Cor. 13:4-7).
- C. Love will never seek anything but the highest good of its fellow men.
  - 1. It does not matter how its fellow men treat it.
  - 2. It does not matter what and who its fellow men are.
  - 3. It does not matter what their attitude is toward it.
  - 4. It will never seek anything but their highest and best good.
  - 5. This can best be seen in God's love for us (Rom. 5:8).
- D. Unlike spiritual gifts, love will never fail (1 Cor. 13:8-12).
- E. Love will outlive faith and hope (1 Cor. 13:13).
  - 1. Faith will eventually become sight (2 Cor. 5:7).
  - 2. Hope will eventually become possession (1 Peter 1:3-5).

### **PROPER OBJECTS OF LOVE**

- A. Love God (Mark 12:29,30)
- B. Love Neighbor (Mark 12:31)
- C. Love Brethren (1 Peter 1:22)
- D. Love Wife (Eph. 5:25,33)
- E. Love Enemy (Matt. 5:43,44)
- F. Love Yourself (Mark 12:31)

## **MANIFESTATIONS OF LOVE**

- A. Love for God (1 John 5:3)
- B. Love for your neighbor (Luke 10:25-37)
- C. Love for your brethren (1 John 3:16-18)
- D. Love for your wife (Eph. 5:28,29)
- E. Love for your enemy (Rom. 12:19-21)
- F. Love for yourself (2 Peter 1:5-11; Rev. 12:11; Matt. 10:39)

**CONCLUSION:** Love is the utmost proof that one knows God (1 John 4:8).  
Do you know God?

FOREST HILLS CHURCH OF CHRIST



## **The Christian Graces**

Mike Willis  
Danville, Indiana

And beside this, giving diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. And N these things be in you, and. abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and bath forgotten that he was purged from his sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:5-11).

Many who have been baptized into Christ fall away from serving Jesus. Some become so wrapped up in the cares of this world that they bear no fruit for Christ and have allowed their remembrance of their salvation to fade. Many begin the course without finishing it (contrast to 2 Tim. 4:6-8). Peter wrote the words of the text before us to encourage our perseverance in Christ.

### **Man's Part: Giving All Diligence**

Earlier Peter declared that God has granted unto us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" through the knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we can become "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (1:3-4). God has provided a revelation sufficient to save men from sin. What must man do in response?

Peter said that man's response is "giving all diligence." (Note: The ASV translated "for this very reason" what the KJV translated "and beside this," thus tying the two thoughts of the text together better.) God's part was to provide all things that pertain to life. and godliness; man's part is to "give a diligence. " There is no excuse for indolence in serving the Lord. When a man shows no diligence, he manifests a lack of appreciation for what God has done for him. Involvement in other

affairs choke out the spiritual word in the lives of many Christians. This lack of diligence results in many being barren and unfruitful; many have forgotten their cleansing from sin.

### **The Christian Graces**

The Christian graces must be built on the foundation of faith. The construction of the language is this: "in your faith supply." Augustine wrote, "Faith is the root and mother of all virtues." Many try to be holy without saving faith; it is a useless effort; only from faith can those spiritual graces spring whose crown is love to all. Faith in the Lord is the fountain from which all virtues flow (cf. Prov. 1:7; 16:6 - the fear of the Lord). Belief in God and concern for standing before him in judgment causes me to live so as to be pleasing to him. Hence, in my faith, I am to add these Christian graces:

1. **Virtue.** The word "virtue" (arete) refers to "manly courage to stand for one's conviction. " Where this virtue is absent, faith cowers and hides. Where this faith is present, man has the courage to confess Jesus even if it costs his life. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were men who showed virtue in their lives. The apostles demonstrated their manly courage when standing before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13-21; 5:29-39,40-41).
2. **Knowledge.** Faith must rest on the word of God (Rom. 10: 17). Where there is virtue without knowledge, there is blind zeal, the courageous stand for spiritual darkness. Hence, one's faith must rest solidly on the word of God in order that a Christian may walk approvingly before God (Col. 1:9-10).
3. **Temperance.** The word "temperance" is translated "self-control" in more recent translations. The word refers to that subduing of one's passions to bring them into compliance with God's word. This is what Paul did when he buffeted his body to bring it into subjection to God's word (1 Cor. 9:27). Self-control needs especially to be practiced with reference to the temper, drinking, sexual appetites, etc. Where temperance is absent, there is knowledge without practice. Each of us has witnessed the Christian who could teach the truth but did not bring his life into compliance with the truth he knew. Hence, self-control needs to be supplied by a living faith.

4. Patience. The word patience emphasizes the need for perseverance in service to Christ. The one lacking this virtue is like the stony ground hearers who "have no root, which for a while believe, and in the time of temptaton fall away" (Lk. 8:13). These hearers are like a fire burning dry grass, which blazes for a moment but quickly dies. The good ground hearers "bring forth fruit with patience" (Lk. 8:15). Where patience is absent there will be no endurance of adversity in the service of Christ.

5. Godliness. The word godliness points to a piety and reverence for God, for his demands on our lives. Godliness causes us to give him the praise, honor, and glory which are due him. There is a respect for the things of God where piety or godliness exists. Where godliness is absent, there exists the endurance of adversity without reverence for God and perhaps with a bitterness of spirit.

6. Brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness prevents that lop-sided interest in spiritual things to the neglect of the needs of brethren. This kind of "spirituality" was-shown by the priests and Levite in the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) who walked past the one in need without helping. Brotherly kindness responds to the needs of one's fellow Christian (Gal. 6:10; 1 Jn. 3:16). This is shown ~v helping one to bear his spiritual and physical burdens.

7. Charity (love). Love is not confined to that small circle of Christians; it reaches out to all of mankind, even as the love of God does. Love responds to the needs of all men, but especially to the needs of the saints (Gal. 6:10). Where this virtue is absent there is the monastic view of life which limits Christianity to those who think and act like we do. Love expresses itself not only to its friends but also to its enemies (cf. Matt. 5:44-48).

### **What These Virtues Do**

Adding these virtud to life contributes these things to the Christian:

1. Positively. (a) "Ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful. " God has so ordained life that fruit will be produced where these virtues exist. Just like a seed planted in moist earth with sunshine will grow into a fruit-bearing plant, so also will a Christian be fruitful where these virtues exist. The fruit he bears will be the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), good works, converts to Christ, etc. Where these things are absent in

one's life, -a person needs to take a personal inventory to see if he is adding the Christian graces to his life.

(b) You make "your calling and election sure." The growth in these graces is an assurance of an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom. Where these things are absent, the Christian cannot have the assurance of salvation which Paul had at his death (cf. 2 Tim. 4:6-8). If I want the confidence which Paul had, I must be "giving all diligence" to add these virtues to my life.

2. Negatively. Where these virtues are absent, these results follow: (a) The Christian is spiritually blind, not able to see afar off. Those who are not adding these virtues to their lives can only see temporal things; they cannot look beyond the horizon of today's pleasure to see tomorrow's reward of glory in heaven. They are unlike Jesus who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12-2). They are unlike Moses who chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:24-25). Those lacking these graces can only see the shame of the cross and the pleasures of sin; they cannot see the "joy" beyond the cross and the short-lived pleasures of sin. They are spiritually near-sighted.

(b) The Christian has forgotten his cleansing from sin. The first love which he had for Christ has waned (Rev. 2:4). There is no remembrance of the joy which one had at his baptism, at the time when Jesus' blood washed away his sins. The cleansing from sin is not viewed as a precious treasure the obtaining of which shall never be forgotten. Instead, it is unimportant to him and the memory of having once possessed it is forgotten.

### **Conclusion**

The closing exhortation of these verses points back to the opening exhortation. In 1 Peter 1:5, the apostle said "giving all diligence" and in 1 Peter 1:11 he again said, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." One's growth in Christ and personal assurance of salvation are directly tied to "giving all diligence."

How much effort are you making to grow in Christ? Will you be a stronger, more knowledgeable, self-controlled, persevering Christian tomorrow than you are today? Will you be fruitful in the Lord's kingdom and service?

Unfortunately, many of us will not be. In ten years, some who are now professing godliness will be in the clutches of Satan and without the hope of salvation. The cause of this will not be uncertain. This will be caused by our not "giving diligence" to make our calling and election sure. We gave diligence to little league, school activities, television, and other things which root Christ out of our lives. Our failures are not caused by a lack of divine grace, but a lack of diligence.

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July 6, 1989

# SONGS OF PRAISE FOR GOD'S GRACE

## Amazing Grace.

J. Newton.

Arr. by G. E. Lee.

1. A - maz - ing grace! how sweet the sound That saved a wretch like me!  
2. Thro' man - y dan - gers, toils and snares, I have al - read - y come;  
3. Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail, And mor - tal life shall cease,

I once was lost, but now am found, Was blind, but now I see!  
'Tis grace has bro't me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.  
I shall pos-sess, with-in the veil, A life of joy and peace.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears re - lieved; ..  
The Lord hath promised good to me, His word my hope se - cures; ..  
This earth will soon dis - solve like snow, The sun for-bear to shine; ..

How pre - cious did that grace ap - pear The hour I first be - lieved!  
He will my shield and por - tion be As long as life en - dures.  
But God, who called me here be - low, Will be for - ev - er mine.

# The American Anthem

## How Amazing Grace went from ignored in Britain to acclaimed in America

Newton's "Amazing Grace" never enthralled his country as it has ours. The British apathy is captured in John Julian's classic *Dictionary of Hymnology* (1892), where he says the famous hymn is "far from being a good example of Newton's work." This indifference might have been because the tune that now seems so essential to the attractiveness and memorability of "Amazing Grace" wasn't yet widely used, or because the British usually preferred a more restrained and unemotional type of religion. Whatever the reason, the words of "Amazing Grace" articulately express American Christianity's emphasis on the conversion experience and simultaneously describe America's cultural and historical journey.

### Revival's "camp classics"

At the time of Newton's death, the dramatic religious revival later known as the Second Great Awakening was in progress. Initially centered on the border of Tennessee and Kentucky, it was characterized by a huge emotional outpouring of dancing, wailing, jumping, laughing, and collapsing. The new style of "camp meeting" revival demanded a new style of worship. The songs had to be memorable because out in the field, in the half light, there could be no hymnals.

As this religious revolution intensified, a parallel musical revolution was under way. Ordinary working people liked to sing, yet almost none of them could read music, and **most churches didn't have musical instruments**. This meant that congregations were entirely dependent on song leaders to strike up tunes and carry them.

To make music more accessible, a different notation had been developed that was relatively easy to learn. This was the "shape-note system," so called because the key to recognition was the shape of the note rather than its position. Peripatetic singing instructors would visit a town for two or three weeks, setting up evening classes in available spaces. The natural outcome was a surge of interest in communal singing and then a growing body of ordinary Americans who had mastered the rudiments of music.

### No, Newton didn't write the tune

Shape-note singers used tune books rather than hymnals. Hymnals were pocket-sized books with texts only. Tune books were large, oblong books with hard covers, often more than 400 pages long. They included both music and text and were introduced by an extended essay on the rudiments of music. It was in one such tune book, *Columbian Harmony* (1829), that "New Britain," the music we now use with "Amazing Grace," was first published.

The marriage with Newton's words took place three years later, in William Walker's celebrated tune book *The Southern Harmony*, an event that makes Walker second only to Newton himself in the story of "Amazing Grace." Today it is hard to hear the tune without imagining the words, and hard to read the words without hearing the tune, yet until Walker saw their compatibility both elements of the song were leading independent lives.

Until this time “Amazing Grace” had been sung to a variety of tunes. When Walker put it with “New Britain” he displayed real genius, because not only did the words fit snugly into the required musical space but the music enhanced the meaning. The music behind “amazing” had a sense of awe to it. The music behind “grace” sounded graceful. There was a rise at the point of confession, as though the author was stepping out into the open and making a bold declaration, but a corresponding fall when admitting his blindness.

*The Southern Harmony* proved enormously successful. It sold an estimated 600,000 copies in a country where the population in 1850 was only just more than 23 million. The book’s success played a vital role in establishing “Amazing Grace” in America. The words corresponded to the American experience in a unique way, not only by delineating the archetypal evangelical conversion but by articulating the groans of a people who frequently had to struggle with poverty and sickness. No other nation was made up of so many pioneers and immediate descendants of pioneers. “Dangers, toils, and snares” had particular resonance for those who’d suffered for their adventure, as did the promise that grace would “lead me home.”

### **The country ditty, citified**

During the Civil War, hymnals such as *Hymns for the Camp* (1862) and *The Soldier’s Hymn Book* (1864), both of which included “Amazing Grace,” were distributed to troops. The prospect of death created a mood of seriousness, and there was a dramatic increase in Bible studies and informal church services among the new recruits.

The song retained its popularity in the rural South, the natural home of *The Southern Harmony*, and then spread into the major cities of the North. If it hadn’t been taken up by northern city dwellers, the tastemakers of postbellum America, it could well have been regarded as merely a quaint example of what country folk used to sing before the war.

The song’s spread to the North was helped by a new style of urban evangelism that featured vocal music. The best-known practitioners were preacher Dwight L. Moody and his song leader Ira Sankey. Since Sankey included “Amazing Grace” in his publications, the song was introduced to a wider audience and couched in a fresh context.

### **The slave-trader’s song reaches the slaves’ hearts**

Away from the gaze of professional musicians, “Amazing Grace” also took root among slaves. Its growth as a white song had been clearly recorded in the books and hymnals, but not so its parallel development as a black song. Enforced illiteracy prevented slaves and their immediate descendants from keeping a detailed record of cultural changes. The slaves took warmly to eighteenth-century English hymns, and it’s easy to see why “Amazing Grace” would emerge as the most loved. It appeared to tell their story. The very fact of their survival proved God had looked after them so far. They might be downtrodden, but there were still victories to be gained, temptations to resist, diseases to be freed from. Like Paul and Silas imprisoned in Philippi, they were able to sing in their chains.

Slaves first learned “Amazing Grace” at the churches of their white masters and mistresses, where they were taken to ensure that they learned how to be worthy, obedient servants; yet contained within its words was the secret of inner release. From the lyrics, the slaves gained assurance that it was possible to be physically enslaved and yet spiritually free. It was possible to be materially impoverished and yet have an overflowing account of righteousness in heaven.



The “Amazing Grace” rendition sung in black churches varied greatly. Men known as “shouting preachers” told folksy tales and then spontaneously broke into a song supported by a small congregation. “Amazing Grace” was one of the few songs to live through this transition from spirituals and “shouting preachers” to the blues- and jazz-inspired gospel music that entered its golden age during the 1940s and 1950s. All the great gospel singers recorded “Amazing Grace,” which reminded them of family roots and the fundamentals of their faith.

### **Newton the hippie?**

During folk music’s hippie heyday, “Amazing Grace” began to assume powerful meaning even within a secular context. On the opening night of Woodstock in August 1969, Arlo Guthrie performed only three songs, one of which was “Amazing Grace.” The song became a highlight of his live show as he broke between stanzas to recount a fanciful version of Newton’s life story. To Guthrie, Newton represented the best the 1960s counterculture could offer.

“I used to think, what’s this ‘saved a wretch like me’? Was it the same old Puritanical ‘we hate everything including ourselves’ stuff?” Guthrie said. “In Newton’s case, he really was a wretched character and he really did feel he had been saved. In his case it wasn’t keeping the world safe from weirdos and he ends up being a countercultural figure. He went against the grain of the times.”

The watershed event for the popularization of “Amazing Grace” was the a cappella single released by Judy Collins in December 1970, which climbed into the best-seller charts in both Britain and America early in 1971. The timing was right for a hit. The war in Vietnam was dragging on as Americans struggled to come to grips with the My Lai massacre. Charles Manson and his hippie acolytes were appearing before a judge on murder charges. It seemed that both the American Dream and the hippie dream had ended up in the same place. There was a widespread yearning for less complicated times, for the days before napalm and LSD, for values that had stood the test of time. “Amazing Grace” provided an appropriate salve.

### **A uniting icon**

For a hymn written by an eighteenth-century British Calvinist, “Amazing Grace” is remarkably transcendent. Its use in the wake of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington illustrated its power to unite Americans and those worldwide who felt sympathy for America. Somehow “Amazing Grace” could embrace core American values without ever sounding triumphalist or jingoistic. It could be sung by young and old, Republican and Democrat, Southern Baptist and Roman Catholic, African American and Native American, military officer and anti-capitalist campaigner.

How sweet the sound, indeed.

*This article is adapted from Steve Turner, Amazing Grace: The Story of America’s Most Beloved Song. Copyright © 2003. Published by arrangement with HarperCollins Publishers.<sup>42</sup>*

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<sup>42</sup> [The American Anthem](#). (2004). *Christian History Magazine-Issue 81: John Newton: Author of “Amazing Grace.”*

# “Amazing Grace”

Posted by [Mark Mayberry](#) May 3, 2012

By Edward Bragwell]

Amazing Grace is a good old song. I have sung it from early childhood. If some of the printed matter on “grace” that I have read lately is true, then it must be more amazing than I had thought.

This newly defined grace is a kind of warmed over, but just half-baked, version of the Calvinistic concept of grace imputed righteousness. It allegedly covers some of a Christian’s sins unconditionally. Yet, it is not broad enough to cover an alien’s sins nor sins wilfully or knowingly done by Christians.

In order to dramatize their point, these brethren talk a lot about a Christian who ignorantly goes over the speed limit (a sin-Rom. 13:1-5). wrecks, and is killed. Will that man be lost? Now, that is nearly as good as the one about the man going to the creek to be baptized, a tree falls on him and kills him on the spot! Will that man be lost?

But back to our unfortunate speedster. Let us just have a big crash while we are at it. While we are just pretending maybe all that will really be hurt will be some foolish notions of brethren. Since these writers do not tell just why the poor fellow was speeding maybe they won’t mind if we supply the reason. He was speeding because he was too busy talking to his passenger to notice the speedometer. You see, his passenger had just learned that Jesus is God’s Son and was to be told about repentance and baptism. This poor fellow was killed too. Wait, there is a second car in the wreck. It is driven by a good brother who knows he is going too fast, but he was in a hurry to get to the church building to baptize a man. The second driver was killed too.

Now if I understand this newly defined grace, the first driver is covered by an ignorance clause. His passenger is not covered because, though ignorant and sincere all right enough, he was not yet in Christ. The second driver is not covered because, though he thought he had a good excuse, he knew that he was speeding and that it was wrong. You see, the first driver gets in under the doctrine that the perfect life of Christ is imputed to those in Christ to cover their sins. Christ lived a life perfect enough to cover the sin of the ignorant speeder, but not perfect enough to cover his passenger’s (though he was more ignorant than the driver) nor does it cover the wilful sin of the second driver. Amazing Grace indeed.

There is a man to whom God does not impute sin (Rom. 4:8). The reason that sin is not imputed to him is not some special arrangement for God to overlook sin, but because his sin is forgiven (v. 7). Forgiveness of sin is conditioned on repentance, both for aliens and children of God. The alien must REPENT and be baptized (Acts 2:38). The erring child of God must REPENT and pray (Acts 8:22; cf. 1 John 1:7-9). A grace that promises salvation to one child of God without repentance and to another only after repentance is amazing. Sins of ignorance and weaknesses of the flesh are supposedly taken care of by the perfect life of Christ-but not sins known to be sin by the sinner. I wonder what happens to a brother who knowingly sins but is too weak in the flesh to avoid it.

The DEATH of Christ covers our sins, when we meet the terms of pardon (Matt. 26:28; Rev. 1:5; Acts 22:16; 1 John 1:7-9). But the Bible simply does not teach that the perfect LIFE of Christ stands before God as a substitute for our imperfect lives. We are made righteous by the redemption of the blood of Christ (Col. 1:14). This is how grace covers our sins. It forgives them when we repent and turn from them.

What about sins that we do not know about? David prayed. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Psa. 19:12). "Secret faults" were not merely sins done in secret. They are contrasted to presumptuous sins (verse 13). He knew that such sins were against him, so he prayed to be (acquitted – NASB) cleansed of them.

If a Christian's sins through ignorance are simply not taken into account by the Lord, then Paul did brethren a disservice by writing several times: "I would not have you ignorant." Preachers had better stop right in the middle of the Great Commission. They should teach enough to baptize folks in order to place them under the perfect life of Christ-but stop short of "teaching them all things whatsoever (Jesus) commanded" lest they learn and can no longer be covered by the ignorance clause of this new law of grace.

Brethren, all this talk about God's overlooking sins of ignorance and fleshly weakness is a cover up. It is but a rationale for fellowshiping baptized believers who practice unscriptural works, items of worship and organizations for the church. That is the root of the matter. Let us riot forget it. We are not judging anyone's motives, but merely stating what is clearly evident on the surface from the writings of these men.

The ones whom I know that are teaching this new-found brand of grace, to their credit, still teach some conditions of fellowship. One must have been baptized (immersed) for the remission of sins. One must be sincere, just ignorant and fleshly weak. Yet, if we suggest that there are other conditions, we become guilty of setting up ourselves as judges. But, the very area of judgment where one has not the right to pass judgment, the area of motives and attitudes, is where they pass judgment. They try to pass judgment on how much one knows and whether he is sincere or not.

One may know what one does and that such is wrong, but only God can know for sure why he does it and if he knows better. If one plans to widen fellowship (and benefits of grace) to include all good honest, sincere, but mistaken brethren-regardless of how unscriptural their congregations have become-he is going to have to play God a lot. He is going to have to pass judgment on his brethren's heart so he can fellowship the sincere and ignorant ones and cast out the insincere and knowing ones. He has his work cut out for him.

I am thankful for God's grace. With Paul, I can say, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). I shall continue to sing about it. I plan to pray "without ceasing" that God will continue to extend his grace in the forgiveness of my sins, all my sins, as I repent and strive to know and do better. He is faithful. He will forgive (1 John 1:7-9).

I also pray that I will in no way encourage a brother to depend on his sincerity or ignorance to get him by. Of course, we must leave final judgment to God. He knows all the facts. If He wants to save both speedsters and the unbaptized passenger, that's fine with me, but I am not going to be presumptuous and hold out promise to anyone that God will save them from any sin without repentance. I will let God handle such\_ cases, if they exist, and continue to teach what the Bible says that one must do about his sins, whether he be an ignorant or knowledgeable brother or alien sinner. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." (2 Thess. 3:18):

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October 10, 1974



I know not why God's  
wondrous grace  
To me He hath made known,  
Nor why, unworthy,  
Christ in love  
Redeemed me for His own.

I know not what  
of good or ill  
May be reserved for me,  
Of weary ways  
or golden days,  
Before His face I see.

## **GRACE GRACE GOD'S GRACE LYRICS**

**By Julia H. Johnston, 1910. Public Domain.**

**Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
There where the blood of the Lamb was  
spilled.**

***Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse  
within;***

***Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin!  
Sin and despair, like the sea waves cold,  
Threaten the soul with infinite loss;  
Grace that is greater, yes, grace untold,  
Points to the refuge, the mighty cross.***

***Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse  
within;***

***Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin!  
Dark is the stain that we cannot hide;  
What can we do to wash it away?  
Look! There is flowing a crimson tide,  
Brighter than snow you may be today.***

***Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse  
within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin!  
Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,  
Freely bestowed on all who believe!  
You that are longing to see His face,  
Will you this moment His grace receive?***

***Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that will pardon and cleanse  
within;  
Grace, grace, God's grace,  
Grace that is greater than all our sin!***

## **Come, Thou Fount of every blessing**

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wand'ring from the face of God;  
He, to save my soul from danger,  
Interposed His precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,  
Bind my wand'ring heart to Thee.  
Teach me, Lord, some rapturous  
measure,  
Meet for me Thy grace to prove,  
While I sing the countless treasure  
Of my God's unchanging love.



Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;  
Prone to leave the God I love:  
Take my heart, oh, take and seal it  
With Thy Spirit from above.  
Rescued thus from sin and danger,  
Purchased by the Savior's blood,  
May I walk on earth a stranger,  
As a son and heir of God.



105 Grace Greater than Our Sin

1. Mar-vel-ous grace of our lov - ing Lord, Grace that ex -  
 2. Dark is the stain that we can - not hide, What can a -  
 3. Mar-vel-ous, in - fi-nite, match-less grace, Free - ly be -

ceeds our sin and our guilt, Yon - der on Cal-vary's mount out -  
 vail to wash it a - way? Look! There is flowing a crim - son  
 stowed on all who be-lieve; All who are longing to see His

poured, There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.  
 tide; Whit - er than snow you may be to - day.  
 face, Will you this mo-ment His grace re - ceive?

*Baptist Hymnal 2008* 105  
 WORDS: Julia H. Johnston  
 MUSIC (MOODY 9.9.9.9, with Chorus): Daniel B. Twener

105 Grace Greater than Our Sin

*Chorus*

17 Mar - vel-ous grace, in - fi-nite grace,  
 Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that will

22 par-don and cleanse with - in; Mar - vel-ous grace,  
 Grace, grace,

27 in - fi-nite grace,  
 God's grace, Grace that is great-er than all our sin.

(segue)

*Baptist Hymnal 2008* 105  
 WORDS: Julia H. Johnston  
 MUSIC (MOODY 9.9.9.9, with Chorus): Daniel B. Twener



## I Know Whom I Have Believed

D. Whittle, J. McGr anahan

Voice

I know not why God's won-drous grace, to me He hath made  
known, Now why, un-wor - thy, Christ in love, re - deem me for His own, But I  
know whom I have be - lieve - ed, and am per - suad - ed that He is a - ble, To  
keep that which I've com - mit - ted, un - to Him a - against that day.



**O That Will Be Glory**

C. H. G. CHAS. H. GAMMON.

1. When all my la-bors and tri-als are o'er, And I am safe on that  
2. When, by the gift of His in-fi-nite grace, I am ac-cord-ed in  
3. Friends will be there I have loved long a-go; Joy like a riv-er a-

beau-ti-ful shore, Just to be near the dear Lord I a-dore,  
Heav-en a place, Just to be there and to look on His face,  
round me will flow; Yet, just a smile from my Sav-ior, I know,

*rit.* - - - - *Chorus. Faster*  
Will thro' the a-ges be glo-ry for me. . . . O that will be  
O . . . . . that will

glo-ry for me, Glo-ry for me, glo-ry for me; When by His grace  
be glo-ry for me, Glo-ry for me, glo-ry for me; . . . . .

*rit.*  
I shall look on His face, That will be glo-ry, be glo-ry for me.

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# *O That Will Be Glory*

2. **When by His grace I shall look on His face,  
That will be glory, be glory for me.**

**When by His grace I shall look on His face,  
That will be glory, be glory for me.**

**When by His grace I shall look on His face,  
That will be glory, be glory for me.**



## Only By Grace

Keith Lancaster  
The Acappella Company

Reigning God: Praise & Harmony A  
Cappella Worship



In His bless-ed prom-is-es sweet vic-to-ry can be found,

This image shows a musical score for a hymn. The score is written on two staves, a treble clef on top and a bass clef on the bottom. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. Below the score, a large group of people, including men, women, and children, are shown singing. They are dressed in casual to semi-formal attire, and their expressions are focused and joyful.







<https://www.facebook.com/choralstream/videos/1148046371882534/?t=33>



*The Spiritual Sword Vol. 17 #4*  
*Special Issue@Amazing Grace*

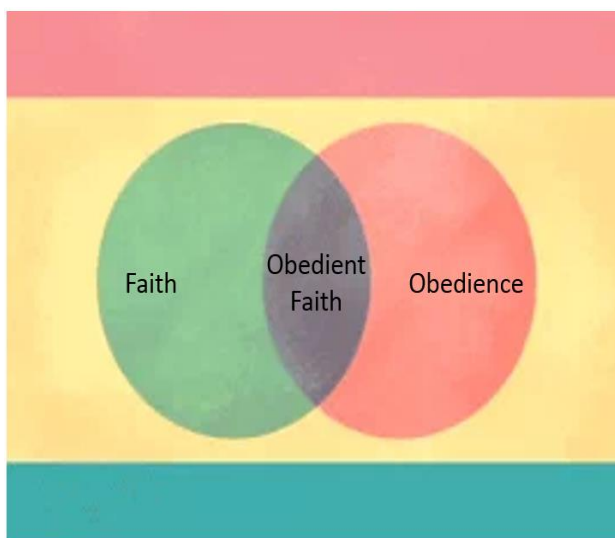
## Grace Demands Faith Obedience

**Conclusion.** “What a wonderful, loving Father we have! By his grace he has provided the *perfect plan* wherein lowly sinful man can escape the snares of Satan. By his grace he has provided the *perfect person* to be our sacrifice for sin, our sin-bearer. By his grace he has provided the *perfect propitiation* for our sins for which we could not other-wise receive pardon. This is the wonderful grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men. But only those who appropriate that marvelous gift through **obedient faith** will be able to enjoy the eternal verities of God’s grace!” – Eddie Whitten

## AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

# Five Steps For Saving:

- HEARING:
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- BELIEVING:
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- REPENTING:
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- CONFESSING:
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- BAPTISM:
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



*O That Will Be Glory*

2. *Wh* O that will be glory for me, e grace,

*I an* Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

*When by His grace I shall look on His face, e*

*That will be glory, be glory for me. me.*

